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Academic Libraries and the changing landscape of higher education

Dennis J Smith
Good Morning and thank you for coming. I’m here today to speak about “How must academic libraries evolve to remain vital in the changing landscape of higher education?”

So as I was thinking through this and how I would approach it, I thought wow, this is a tough subject. And one of the first things I came across was this quote.
Swanger was talking about a lot of issues facing higher education, including issues such as funding, demographics changes in American society, the way in which students learn today and more.

"The political climate for higher education is becoming a minefield."

Dr. Dustin Swanger, July 2016
So to begin, I’d like to just give you a quick outline of how I organized my thoughts. There are a lot going on today, but I selected a few trends to highlight, then I’d to share what I think might be some approaches to addressing these issues and then I’d like to share some examples of things that are happening in my institution.
First, as you might have surmised by my opening quote, it is about the money. The reality of higher education, particularly publicly funding education, is the declining support. In 2016, Bosch and Henderson reported on a survey from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities the showed 46 states reduced funding by 10B from 2007-8 to 2016.
In an article in 2017, WVU lost 38M in state funding over the last four years. The library is not immune to the issues that face the institution. What is the solution? Rising tuitions, fees, or less services?
Libraries are also challenged from the other side. In a survey of selected journals, a review showed an average 5.5-6% increase 2016 to 2017 and an average 6% increase 2017 to 2018. I read WVU announcement to unbundled its Elsevier package. UC and LSU are also taking steps about this issue.
A trend none of us can escape is technology. It will continue to move whether we do or not. This is just a short list of just some of the technology that I’ve had to learn, understand and work with over the past few years. I’m sure many of you recognize these.
When looking at students, total enrollments go through ups and downs, but from 2005 to 2015 for post secondary institutions went up 14%. In addition, we are encountering a more diverse student body and we now have a large group of non-traditional students as many institutions, include an increase in veterans. These are all factors neither the institution nor the library can ignore.
So I wanted to share this slide because I think it is example of the narrow definition of an evolving library. The photo in the top is a look at our new distinctive collections reading room. This room used to contained our distinctive collections in compact shelving within this same room. We had to clear it out and move those collections to remote storage. The bottom photo is the NCSU bookbot which now houses a significant portion of the general and special collections. When you talk about libraries evolving, this is the scenario that most people will refer to. I would say that there is so much more to defining a library than just this part of the evolution.
Here are three approaches that I think are the short answer to the question of how we evolve and remain vital. We enhance our engagement, embrace and use technology, and collaborate and refine our services. I already know that WVU is already doing a lot of these examples as are many institutions. I’d like to share some examples that I think illustrate these approaches.
This is a proposal that is part of the Senate Academic Integrity Committee that I serve on. During the evolution of this proposal, there was discussion about how the Dean of Students and the Student Honor Counsel would develop an education program about this issue. As part of the discussion, I brought up the significant assistance the library can be as part of this program and was readily including in our report. Being at the table and be an advocate for what we can do shows how we can be vital to the institution.
This example covers a couple of things. First we streamlined our reserves processing using the Ex Libris Leganto. With the time savings, we created a proactive approach to reserves. Each semester we review the required texts for many of the classes and match them to our current holdings. We then place them on reserves and reach out to the professors to let them know and try to develop a stronger relationship with them. We have also done some selective purchasing of textbooks particularly in areas of high use.
One of the things I did was to begin the structured collection of important data to for access services. We took that data and created this dashboard, so that we can visualize and ultimately use it to make improvements in service coverage, library hours and student scheduling. One of the most important things is now we can share that data with others in the institution. Showing our impact and engagement with our community.
Now a learning commons is not a new invention, but I think that we have done a few things differently that speak to how we build relationships that how vital we can be. In addition to locating these partners in the library, and others who are not, we also integrated library services “into” the learning commons.

Examples - Collaboration and Refine Services

**Learning Commons**

- Learning Innovation and Faculty Engagement (Academic Technologies)
- Camner Center (Undergraduate Education)
- Math Lab (College of Arts and Sciences)
- Modern Languages Lab (College of Arts and Sciences)
- Student Technology Help Desk (Academic Technologies)
- Writing Center (College of Arts and Sciences)
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With this example I was going to discuss a project that has just begun to engage the library with the interdisciplinary research on our campus that began with a program called Ulink which had interdisciplinary research teams each with a librarian as part of the team. In looking at what WVU is doing, I saw that you have begun an interesting project as well. Both of these projects put the library and interdisciplinary research front and center. It will be interesting to contract and compare these projects and their outcomes over times as the approaches by each institution are slightly unique. But I think both projects that show being active, engaged and open to evolving is how we remain vital to our institutions.
Thank you.
Thank You

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