

How do we ensure a healthy future for academic libraries?

Insights from library
thought leaders



Summary

In a recent Technology from Sage report, 75 percent of librarians said they agreed that, “the mission of the library is not about buildings and collections, but who librarians serve.” But what does this mission look like as patrons’ needs, working preferences, and preferred tools change? And, if we begin with the premise that the librarian must thrive in order for students and faculty to succeed – a belief we subscribe to at Sage – how do we ensure that librarians can fulfill this mission?

We asked nine thought leaders in the industry to respond to one of the following questions to get some answers: What should members of the higher ed community do now to ensure a healthy future for academic librarianship? What persistent challenge do your patrons face that you most wish — if you had a magic wand — you could erase for them? What current trend do you wish would become part of the higher ed canon? Why?

Below are some themes from their insightful and passionate responses.

The changing definition of “librarian” offers a golden opportunity

Several librarians referenced the changing academic landscape brought on by COVID, the open science movement, and rapid AI advances, all of which redefine the librarian’s role (once again!). Yet with each of these changes, the librarian has never been more vital.

But how can librarians re-engineer their own role while making the best use of unique traditional librarian talent?

Ian Snowley, dean of learning skills and university librarian at The University of Lincoln, says the answer is “very simple – focus our services and our support where it will have the greatest impact on our institution’s mission.” By starting with that bigger picture academic libraries will stay relevant for the long term.

Andrew Barker, director of library services and learning development at Lancaster University, says that it’s all about where skills meet partnerships. “We can start by moving beyond some of what are considered our traditional roles, building on our recent achievements and our skills, and looking to where our skills align with opportunities to partner. That may be in the digital sphere, where our knowledge often plays a major role, it may be data, it may be information, it may be the relationships we have across the university and across the wider sector including our vendor partners... It is this move beyond service provision to partners in our university’s strategic endeavors that will ensure a healthy future for academic libraries.”

Librarians can – and should – play a more central role in enabling student success

Some responses highlighted collaboration between different departments, particularly between librarians and faculty, to promote student success. Andrew Carlos, head of research, outreach, and inclusion at Santa Clara University, emphasizes that librarians -- given their role promoting information literacy -- should take a leadership role by offering more than just instructional sessions.

Sarah Morris, research coordinator and instructional strategist at Hacks/Hackers, suggests that librarians can work with faculty to design research assignments that align with students’ goals, address faculty frustrations, and address real-world issues. “From institutional racism to the climate emergency, and/or utilizing different technologies in research assignments to help students develop additional valuable digital skills,” librarians can address issues faced on campus and beyond.

To invest in the library, we must invest in the librarian

In order for librarians to support the processes of growing student skills, they too must invest in their own professional growth.

Courtney Young, university librarian at Colgate University, says, “Librarians must continually further their learning and develop skills applicable to the ways students are being asked to work.” Yet, they constantly meet barriers such as low funding for conference

attendance or professional memberships, little time for learning or researching, and little recognition from their institutions for engaging in such pursuits.

Andrew Carlos agrees that “campuses need to acknowledge the skills and knowledge of all library staff” – skills that go far beyond the traditional. “Given the nature of our work with students, they often feel comfortable sharing information with us that they wouldn't share with their professors or others on campus. We also see and hear students' struggles - we help as they struggle through enrolling in a class, provide snacks because they haven't had anything to eat, and navigate websites looking for housing.”

Emerging technologies need to be considered thoughtfully (and not as foe)

Of course, as new technologies arise, new skills must be learned. For example, librarians who “recognize that the rise of AI is an opportunity to stimulate and strengthen their talents and personal values” will ultimately foster “innovation while taking advantage of their unique human traits – traits that will be essential in the competitive job market of the future,” says Nora Quiroz, university librarian at Universidad CES, Medellin – Colombia.

Specifically, librarians should consider adding a new role to their ever-expanding list – “prompt engineer” to help those engaging with AI to get the answers they need.

Ray Pun, academic/research librarian at the Alder Graduate School of Education, agrees with this framing. “What is certain is that we have an adversarial relationship with any new technology and may need to rethink how to work with [ChatGPT] in a critical way that interrogates the content these tools produce.” But he warns that such an interrogation “must be centered on values of justice, equity, diversity, equity, and inclusion,” as the tool reflects – or even heightens – biases it encounters. Pun recommends that institutions adopt their own ethical frameworks for campus-wide treatment of the tool.

Librarian wellbeing needs to be prioritized

Many of the responses nodded toward the emotional nature of library work and the pressure it places on library workers.

John Burgess says this in part reflects that librarians often internalize a “gap” “between their initial, idealized versions of that career and the everyday reality of their workplace.” He continues, “Academic librarians operate at the intersection of high ideals and little direct reward for possessing those ideals, rendering them highly susceptible to burnout”

So what can be done to support the librarian struggling to live up to their ideals and suffering as a result?

“The antidote to occupational burnout is not getting rid of our ideals, it is cultivating a nuanced, mutualistic, more mature relationship with them. While it should not be up to individual librarians to resist occupational burnout, I believe everyone can benefit from learning techniques to minimize the risk.

Jamia Williams, consumer health program specialist with the Network of the National Library of Medicine Training Office, advocates for flexibility to support librarian wellbeing, including work-from-home arrangements. “[During the pandemic,] this allowed us to be present for ourselves and our loved ones. We need to do a better job with boundary setting to thrive at work.”

Of course, there were a lot more insights shared. Read on to learn more from the full responses.

Modern Libraries Put the Meaning into 'Meaningful'

*By Andrew Barker, Director of Library
Services & Learning Development,
Lancaster University*



What should we – any member of the higher ed community – do now to ensure a healthy future for academic librarianship?

About 20 years ago a library colleague said to me, half in jest, but half very much not in jest: “Well, you might just make it to retirement before libraries become meaningless.” His argument then was that a mixture of the internet and the transitioning of the library building from a space where people predominantly use books to one where people predominantly stay to study and which could be managed by any university service, was killing off the library as we knew it. Yet here we are 20 years later and academic libraries and librarians have never been so vital; indeed, during the pandemic many of our library buildings were the university, the demonstration that our institutions were open. So how have we done it, and where do we go from here to ensure an even healthier future for us all?

One game changer was the open access agenda – and it is that I want to focus on (I could write other blogs on a range of things from the birth of the Network Security Services and the building of new library buildings, new library staff with different skillsets – all of which have been at some level drivers for change, but let’s focus on one thing). Open access – before it widened to include open data and then widened more helpfully to ‘open research’ – helped the library to position itself away from a simple intermediary service, a service providing content already created, to a vital partner in the research lifecycle and involved in the wider scholarly communications ecosystem from beginning to end.

Five hundred words isn’t enough, but OA was the crack in the Liberty Bell – we went from a position of having to explain why libraries should be involved in discussions relating to research, to a position now where no serious researcher or research office would think about excluding us from their discussions and governance structures, especially in relation to managing compliance.

However, we need to move on, to ‘transition’ ourselves beyond managing compliance to leading and developing new approaches to the research culture that exists within our universities and the broader sector.

Part of that transition involves language. As an example, increasingly, I am troubled by the word ‘service’ to describe the library. We are not a service – we have services, certainly – and look, our services are always the highest-rated parts of a university, they are overwhelmingly excellent. But calling libraries services is like referring to open research as open access – it only covers part of what we do and who we are.

We can start by moving beyond some of what are considered our traditional roles, building on our recent achievements and our skills, and looking to where our skills align with opportunities to partner. That may be in the digital sphere, where our knowledge often plays a major role, it may be data, it may be information, it may be the relationships we have across the university and across the wider sector including our vendor partners. There are a lot of areas where we play a role and where partnership is the key. Indeed, at Lancaster University Library we have several examples where we are named partners in research bids, and we contribute to the intellectual discussions in research, education and engagement.

It is this move beyond service provision to partners in our university's strategic endeavors that will ensure a healthy future for academic libraries. The new UKRI OA policy on long-form publications which goes into effect in 2024 is a good place to start. Reflecting on what role we play in creating open access long-form publications can help shape the next generation of academic libraries. Indeed, if I was speaking to a younger colleague now, I'd tell them libraries will never be meaningless – not as long as we bring meaning to what we do.

Andrew Barker has been Library Director at Lancaster University since September 2019.

Prior to that he held a number of senior roles within a wide range of universities, including both Russell Group and Post 1992 Institutions. Within these institutions he has been responsible for all aspects of library leadership, including content, academic liaison, customer services and archives and museums. At Lancaster Andrew has led on the development of a new library vision and led on the successful application for Lancaster University to become a member of RLUK.

Throughout his career in HE Andrew has worked visibly, and actively, across the sector, often working closely with publishers on projects and advisory boards. Andrew was chair of UKSG between 2018 and 2022 and is currently co-chair of SCONUL.

Resisting Occupational Burnout with a Mature Professional Ethics

*By John T. F. Burgess, Assistant Professor,
School of Library and Information Studies,
University of Alabama*



What should we – any member of the higher ed community – do now to ensure a healthy future for academic librarianship?

Being an academic librarian is intellectually and technically challenging work. It can be emotionally taxing as well, and not just for those who work directly with patrons. While MLIS coursework prepares learners for those technical and intellectual challenges, less common are courses that foster skills needed to stand up to emotional challenges.

This choice is particularly troubling since academic librarians are susceptible to occupational burnout at high rates. Recent research bears this out, as a large study of academic librarians in public services roles revealed that almost 50 percent reported experiencing occupational burnout, exceeding the value for any other profession in a comparable study. Awareness of burnout in LIS practice continues to rise, which is unsurprising given the extraordinary challenges created by the pandemic and administrative responses to it. As Ayala Pines and Elliot Aronson defined in their 1988 book on career burnout, occupational burnout is “a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations” brought about by workplace conditions. In a 1998 journal article, Christina Maslach and Julia Goldberg add that burnout is marked by “feelings of frustration, anger, and cynicism; and a sense of ineffectiveness and failure.” Once one experiences burnout, it can take years to overcome its debilitating effects.

While chronic workplace stress is a major contributor to the development of occupational burnout, simply being under stress is not the main indicator of whether a person will develop burnout. Instead, worker disposition and expectations contribute to the development of burnout. As Pines explains in the 1993 Handbook of Stress, burnout specifically occurs in those who enter a career possessing “high ideals, motivation, and commitment,” but realize under conditions of chronic stress that a significant gap exists between their initial, idealized versions of that career and the everyday reality of their workplace. And as Herber Freudenberger and Geraldine Richelson explain, feelings of ineffectiveness rise, “whenever the expectation level is dramatically opposed to reality and the person persists in trying to reach that expectation” (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980, p. 13).

Academic librarians operate at the intersection of high ideals and little direct reward for possessing those ideals, rendering them highly susceptible to burnout. Fobazi Ettarh aptly describes this phenomenon as vocational awe, the sense that to join the LIS profession is to answer a great calling in life. Ettarh draws a direct connection between rhetoric that reifies the mission of LIS professionals and the prevalence of occupational burnout. Her proposed remedies are to embrace an ethos of criticism to deconstruct the library as a pristine institution, to focus LIS values on actual duties instead of on the aspirational transformation of society, and to reframe librarial work as labor for real people instead of service to some notion of the greater good.

If our professional values, as currently taught, truly make us more vulnerable to occupational burnout, then how we teach those values must change. As an ethicist and LIS educator, I see a lot of value in cultivating moral reasoning skills to make oneself less vulnerable to thwarted idealism. These are relatively simple techniques that promote ethical decision-making as a skill like any other. With just a little training, LIS professional values can cease being abstract, absolutist ideals and start being tools to help you set and implement library policy. The book that Emily Knox and I edited, *Foundations of Information Ethics*, provides a good summary of this approach.

Even without pursuing moral reasoning in depth, if I were to make one recommendation it would be this: Recognize that your professional ethics exist to serve you and to help you make the best decisions you can for yourself, your patrons, institution, and society. You are not beholden to them as an absolute, unchanging good. Ethics grow, change, and mature. This is why we revise and add to our ethical codes over time. The antidote to occupational burnout is not getting rid of our ideals, but cultivating a nuanced, mutualistic, more mature relationship with them. While it should not be up to individual librarians to resist occupational burnout, I believe everyone can benefit from learning techniques to minimize the risk.

John T. F. Burgess is an Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies. His research focuses on moral reasoning and sustainability ethics for library and information science professionals. He teaches courses in areas of information ethics, academic librarianship and information literacy and is active in several information ethics and policy related special interest groups.

I See You: Acknowledging Libraries Now and in the Future

*Andrew Carlos, Head of Research, Outreach,
and Inclusion at Santa Clara University*



Talk about the future of libraries is cyclical. Through the years of feast or famine, one continuous thread in this conversation has been what the future library looks like. In light of recent discourse around library budgets and announcements regarding moving away from a physical library with books, what is the library's future? What are the things that we can do now to ensure the health of these institutions?

If we want to ensure a healthy future for academic libraries, there are three things that we can do now to prepare ourselves:

- Acknowledge the expertise of all library staff
- Build coalitions with other student support services
- Fund the library

Campuses need to acknowledge the skills and knowledge of all library staff. Given the nature of our work, students often feel comfortable sharing information with us that they wouldn't share with their professors or others on campus. We also see and hear students' struggles: we help as they struggle to enroll in a class, provide snacks when they haven't had anything to eat, and witness as they navigate websites looking for housing.

Listen to library staff when we share concerns. Our concerns aren't coming from a vacuum – they are evidence-based. The simple act of listening also shows trust in staff as professionals; we often feel marginalized by decisions made on campus without our input that affect our work.

Student success is not the responsibility of one single department on campus – it requires collaboration between many departments. The library is well-positioned to play a leadership role in these efforts. We are often (literally) centrally located on campus and seen as a neutral location (not in the "Libraries are Neutral" sense, but that we support all departments equally as much as we can).

Invite libraries to the table during discussions on student success initiatives. Given the central role that information literacy and critical thinking play in society, libraries can offer much more to their campuses beyond the occasional one-shot instruction session. Many public services and instruction librarians are excited to engage with students. Please use our enthusiasm!

Fund the Library. Full Stop. Period. End of Story.

Libraries already do so many amazing things with such little funding; imagine the possibilities if we were fully staffed and had the budget to buy all the resources the campus needs and fund programming and services that are culturally relevant to our students – all without having to figure out what service to cut, what database to let go, or what staff position not to fill. More funding would also allow us to pay our staff what they are actually worth. (I repeat. Pay people what they are worth.)

A healthy future for libraries relies on acknowledging libraries' vital role on campus. See Us. Acknowledge Us.

Andrew Carlos is the Head of Research, Outreach, and Inclusion at Santa Clara University, where he oversees the Reference and Research Services program, conducts outreach to bring students into the library, and works to create an inclusive and welcoming space for all. He loves movie and tv spoilers, dancing in his head to pop divas, and playing games online with his husband.

Research assignments and the purpose and value of college

By Sarah Morris, Research Coordinator and Instructional Strategist at Hacks/Hackers



What persistent challenge do your patrons face in their teaching, learning, and researching, that you most wish – if you had a magic wand – you could erase for them? What do you think it might take to get there without that wand?

For those who work in higher education, we seem to spend an inordinate amount of time navigating one crisis after another. There's the dreaded enrollment cliff, the rising cost of college, the decline of liberal arts majors, and the crisis in writing itself with the arrival of ChatGPT. I mention all this not to recall the meme of the little dog sitting in a room filled with flames, claiming that everything is fine, but to unpack a question that I feel underlies all these debates: what is the value and the purpose of college? If you pose that question to the different groups and individuals who make up the fabric of a campus community, you will get very different answers.

Librarians are also navigating questions around what colleges are (and what they will be in the future) in our instruction and outreach, our interactions with campus partners, and our collections and technology decisions. I feel many librarians see this question around the purpose and value of college play out among our students (especially undergraduates) and faculty via the trusty research assignment. Students might view a research assignment as a distraction from their more important studies or as something to be endured on their way to a degree and a job rather than a space to develop valuable transferable skills. Faculty, meanwhile, might struggle to get their students to grasp the point, purpose, and overall value of the research assignment.

We can't wave a magic wand and get faculty and students on the same page as to the value of research assignments and the value librarians can play in crafting, facilitating, and supporting such assignments. But I believe that librarians can play a vital role in not just bridging these divides and addressing the frustrations that can arise, but in tackling the underlying questions around the purpose and value of college as well. By addressing these frustrations, sharing research that's being done into research assignments, and suggesting new ideas, we can open the door to new collaborations with faculty and students (a perennial struggle in libraries).

For example, librarians can work with faculty to consider ways to scaffold assignments to meet students where they are not only in terms of skills but also their goals. Librarians can also address some of the frustrations that faculty might have around research assignments in the process. Some approaches include explicitly highlighting how the skills that students gain during a research assignment can be utilized in a variety of future academic and career paths, sharing examples of how research skills can be used to address serious issues facing us all today, from institutional racism to the climate emergency, and/or utilizing different technologies in research assignments to help students develop additional valuable digital skills.

Librarians have unique insights into the differing viewpoints of our patrons. By working with faculty and students around research assignments, librarians can not only advocate for the valuable work they do, but also help faculty and students overcome the disconnect they might feel toward research assignments and the purpose and value of college itself. Research skills are some of the most valuable skills someone can have in our current era, and everyone wins when we can better equip students with these increasingly valuable and vital skills.

Sarah Morris is a librarian, educator, and curriculum designer whose research and work focuses on critical information, digital, and media literacy, misinformation, civic engagement, and library and information science education. Sarah has been a librarian for ten years and received her Master's in Information Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. She held positions at Loyola University Chicago and the University of Texas and served as the Head of Instruction and Engagement at the Emory University Libraries. In addition to her work in libraries, Sarah has worked on curriculum projects with partners that include the Mozilla Foundation and the Carter Center. She currently works as a Research Coordinator and Instructional Strategist on an NSF-grant project on science communication and misinformation, managed by media Hacks/Hackers and the University of Washington.

ChatGPT trending in library instruction: We need an ethical framework

By Ray Pun, Academic/Research Librarian,
Alder Graduate School of Education



What current trend do you wish would become part of the higher ed canon? Why?

We are seeing the increasing presence of generative artificial intelligence in society, especially in education, with ChatGPT as an example that has inevitably created buzz, concerns -- and tension. Released in November 2022, ChatGPT stands for "Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer." Developed by Open AI, an American artificial intelligence research laboratory, ChatGPT is essentially a chatbot that can generate essays, poems, song lyrics, questions, and a list of resources based on the given question or topic. Anyone can create an account on OpenAI to use it. It's not perfect, but it is indeed powerful.

Many schools within the P-12 system in the United States have banned students from using ChatGPT. Using ChatGPT to cheat or avert learning has been a major thread on why this tool should not be used. That's student use. It's too early to fully determine how this technology will be deployed into teaching, learning and research effectively, but it's not too early to ask how will librarians use it (and its inevitable follow-up technologies), and if they should use it at all?

What is certain is that we have an adversarial relationship with any new technology and may need to rethink how to work with this tool in a critical way that interrogates the content these tools produce. In February 2023, I raised these questions and issues in a LILi (Lifelong Information Literacy) Show & Tell Webinar presentation for library workers and how we need to reframe our view of this technology.

Since it is generative artificial intelligence, ChatGPT does not compute or analyze existing data, but draws on information it learned from data to generate responses. In discussion forums and listservs, librarians have discussed ways to cite ChatGPT responses in APA/IEEE/MLA styles, and to use ChatGPT to support academic research by creating a list of sources. This tool also has potential in supporting reading comprehension by breaking down complex ideas and topics, especially for emergent bilinguals and those struggling with literacy.

But there has to be discussion and consensus on an ethical framework that guides the usage of ChatGPT among instructors and librarians. The tool can heighten biases from its responses (and from our own). Many of the sources that ChatGPT generates can be connected to a dominant viewpoint based on the data from the Internet. This can intentionally neglect voices and perspectives from those with marginalized backgrounds. Can we recognize this exclusion and limitation in its responses? Can we question these responses and not immediately take them as face value or credible? An ethical framework guides us on how we use, consume, and manage AI and its generative content and must be centered on values of justice, equity, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

If we do not have these discussions, we may marginalize our learners further, perpetuating a dominant viewpoint while discounting the rest. Consider having this discussion with your academic and information technology leaders to discuss what this ethical framework could look like on your campus.

ChatGPT has released an updated and more sophisticated version in the summer of 2023. It's not going away (and this blog post was not generated by ChatGPT). In the end, there are no clear solutions on embracing or banning this tool but tradeoffs. We need to be prepared to address this trend and its impact on teaching, learning and research proactively and guided by an ethical framework.

Ray Pun (he/him) is the academic/research librarian at the Alder Graduate School of Education, a teacher's preparation program in California. He holds a doctorate in education, and a master of library sciences. You can find him on Twitter @raypun101.

A new profile for librarians brought by AI

*Nora Quiroz, University Librarian,
Universidad CES, Medellin – Colombia*



What current trend do you wish would become part of the higher ed canon? Why?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the landscape, bringing with it new challenges, contexts, questions, concepts, and paths for librarians. It is essential for us to develop the necessary skills to perform these new roles and adapt ourselves to the future.

Are you familiar with the term, “Prompt”? It can be understood as a request. In the AI environment, a prompt is a word, phrase, or question, that when entered into an advanced artificial language model, such as ChatGPT, returns an answer that should be coherent and clear -- which means we can have interactive communication with the model. These advanced language models have built-in linguistic information and patterns that help them respond to questions reasonably and assertively.

What does this have to do with librarians?

For decades, librarians have been the masters of controlled language, the semantic web, and linked data—or at least we should have been. Library schools teach normalization, systematization, and cataloguing to facilitate the retrieval of information through subject heading lists and thesaurus. This doesn't even mention the importance of rich metadata essential for libraries in the digital age.

AI cries out for specialists who can generate “prompts” precise enough to obtain answers to their users’ questions. These can be quite complex, since it is difficult to find the exact words for what you want to describe. From there, a new profile is born for librarians, the “Prompt Engineer.” Demand for these prompt engineers is increasing, especially from AI-based companies offering very competitive salaries.

This new profile requires knowledge about large language models, technology, and programming; but even more, those that humanize the technologies. This is made clear by a job offer from the Anthropic company, which highlights that a good candidate should have strengths such as:

- Communication and relationship with customers and the environment
- Ability to transmit and teach technical concepts
- Problem solution oriented
- Organizational mentality and teamwork
- Creative thinking and proactivity
- Innovation, keeping up to date with industry trends

Although AI has the potential to create new jobs within the librarian community, it is necessary to develop the right skills to fill them.

Library talents

Librarians with vision must recognize that the rise of AI is an opportunity to stimulate and strengthen their talents and personal values, generating spaces for innovation while taking advantage of their unique human traits – traits that will be essential in the competitive job market of the future.

As we continue to discover the tremendous opportunities that advances in digital technology bring to us as librarians, we must also rethink the changing role of information professionals in a fast-paced world that is constantly reshaping the skills and abilities of the global workforce.

Nora Quiroz is an expert in management, specialist in senior management and Colombian librarian. She is creator of the library community “Biblioteccoach”, where leadership, library and coaching experiences are articulated around humanity in library services.

Making impact by connecting library support with your institution's mission

By Ian Snowley, Dean of Learning Skills & University Librarian, The University of Lincoln



What can we (as librarians) do to ensure a healthy future for academic librarianship?

For me, the answer to this question is very simple: focus our services and support where it will have the greatest impact on our institution's mission. To some extent this is self-evident, which is why I say the answer is simple. However, that doesn't mean that all institutions will have the same answer, nor that it will be straightforward to identify this area or effectively direct resources towards it.

A Little Background

Given the above, I feel that I can best answer this question from my own experience at the University of Lincoln, although I do hope some of my points are relevant more widely.

For those who don't know, Lincoln is a medium-sized (c. 18,000 full-time enrolled) modern university in England, formed in the mid-1970s and taking its current name in 2001. The library at Lincoln has long had a strong focus on supporting individual students with a relatively large academic subject librarian (ASL) team closely focused on supporting individual students as well as their academics.

Skills, Skills, Skills

And it's this idea of supporting students directly that gives my answer to Sage's question. Over the past 13 years we have worked to develop our model of student support focusing on both the skills to use the library effectively and the skills needed to succeed academically and beyond university.

Over the years this has taken a number of forms, and I would argue that its focus has changed many times. But there are some constants: ASLs have been the key method of delivery, although we have also (in common with other higher education institutions) extended the range of our support, adding academic writing and maths & stats over the years. One other constant has been a desire to engage with students early on, which has resulted in a focus on transition and a welcome week. This focus has been challenging in terms of creating meaningful and lasting engagement with students at a time when they are much more interested in forming new relationships and learning to live independently.

Which takes us to an important question: if we accept that skills, both library and academic, are our key focus, then when and how do we deliver these? It's clear to me that timing and integration with teaching and the academic program is key here – and that we must work together with academics to achieve the impact we are looking for. I've already noted the challenges of imparting meaningful information during transition and arrival, so our focus has been on using those stages to put down a marker – returning at a later and (hopefully) more receptive point to really make our impact. We do this by focusing on key points in the student journey, such as the first assignment, exams, etc., and tailor and promote our support to address the real concerns (and fears) that students are likely to have when faced by these challenges.

Conclusion

This has been a rather whistlestop tour of what I consider to be Lincoln's contribution to keeping academic libraries relevant – but as I've indicated your answer will at the very least be a little different in its focus and may even be completely different to ours.

Ian Snowley joined the University of Lincoln, as University Librarian in September 2009, before that he was Head of Higher Education at the British Library.

His professional career began in Public Libraries followed by posts in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health. After this Ian worked at the Royal Society of Medicine as Director of Information Services. In 2006 he joined the University of London Research Library Services as Director, Academic Services.

He was President of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in 2007.

His professional interests are in academic library and information services strategic management, managing change, project management and planning services.

Making the most of pandemic lessons learned

By Jamia Williams, Consumer Health Program Specialist with the Network of the National Library of Medicine (NNLM) Training Office



What should we – any member of the higher ed community – do now to ensure a healthy future for academic librarianship?

There's a range of answers. Hopefully, we learned some things during the COVID-19 pandemic. One is that flexible hybrid or remote work schedules allow us to be present for ourselves and our loved ones. We need to do a better job with boundary setting to thrive at work.

We also must continue to grapple with and advocate for the necessity of academic libraries in our institutions, as diverse American narratives are under attack by those wishing to disparage information seekers with censorship. Furthermore, our students need easier access to textbooks, whether by ensuring that required texts are available through course reserve or by making textbooks an open resource. Also, we can continue making sure that our institutions are aware of the library repositories so that the research done by faculty and students can be easily shared and accessed.

We need to continue to move forward in open scholarship and open access. As academic librarians that teach, we should have learned ways to engage with students virtually. Virtual spaces should continue to be explored, and our skill sets should continue to evolve. We can continue using different engagement tools for our in-person sessions with students. Since 2020, it has been difficult for most of us because of the uncertainty, grief, inflation, and job creep, so we should take the best of things learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and apply them in the present and future to make our workplaces better for everyone.

Then there are the challenges.

The most persistent challenge for the patrons I encountered in an academic library was the burden of textbook costs. If I had a magic wand, I would ensure that the library purchased all required textbooks for students to access online and in person. Many of our programs are completely online, so making textbooks accessible both physically and virtually would be life changing. In the meantime, our academic libraries do what they can to get the required texts in their libraries by working with faculty and obtaining grants to fund this expensive undertaking. This is also an opportunity for open educational resources librarians to continue working with faculty to create or support more open educational resources for their courses. We must continue advocating on a local and federal level for this change for students.

And what would I like to see become part of the higher ed canon?

If added to the higher education canon, trauma-informed care practices would be life-changing for our faculty, students, and staff. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has six guiding principles for embracing a trauma-informed approach:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice, and choice
6. Cultural, historical, and gender issues

Trauma-informed care in higher education would be an ongoing way to assess how we interact with each other at the academy. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control encapsulates this perfectly is writing: "Adopting a trauma-informed approach is not accomplished through any single particular technique or checklist... Ongoing internal organizational assessment and quality improvement, as well as engagement with community stakeholders, will help to imbed this approach which can be augmented with organizational development and practice improvement." Lastly, trauma-informed care would encourage honesty about historical and current discrimination against marginalized people and offer insights into dismantling these systems of oppression within the academy.

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We should recognize that we're always librarians

*Courtney L. Young, University Librarian,
Colgate University, ALA President 2014-2015*



What should we – any member of the higher ed community – do now to ensure a healthy future for academic librarianship?

Support for professional development must be normalized. Academic librarians at all types of institutions are met with barriers when it comes to participating in this important component of our professional practice and development, including:

- Minimal, if any, funding for conference attendance or professional membership
- Not enough time to attend conferences or online learning opportunities
- Not enough time or encouragement for scholarly engagement that results in poster sessions, presentations, or publications
- Lack of recognition for the need for such participation and potential positive impact on students, faculty, and library colleagues.

Librarians must continually further their learning and develop skills applicable to the ways students are being asked to work.

It is more important than ever to recruit a workforce that is interested in working with people just as much as, if not more than, working with information in its various containers. Relevant academic training remains foundational to our work and continues to be important. While the courses I took in my LIS program included classes that surprised my early-to-mid career and veteran librarian colleagues, those who have recently joined the profession are graduating having taken courses that reflect the evolving needs of higher education. But a degree is not enough. The ability to work with people – departmental colleagues, supervisors, supervisees, colleagues beyond the department, faculty, staff, and of course students – is paramount. In particular, we need to build relationships to advance the goals of the institution, the library, and our students.

We need to think about how this extends beyond the institution. Publishers and vendors are also part of the “ecosystem of libraries,” as noted by former ALA President Jim Rettig. When I started my career, I was taught that the vendors from whom we subscribed and purchased were the enemy. We needed to do everything possible to get from them what we deserved. Then I learned that some of these actually employed librarians. Those librarians, and their colleagues with other expertise, wanted to support us in our collaborations with faculty and students. They are also in the information business, working on creative ways to provide users with the information they seek. Stronger partnerships with those vendor and publisher colleagues who support our work can go a long way.

Our ability to build relationships allows us to continually improve the profession and the user experience. There is no one way to do this, but we must be open and willing to take an active role in this work. In fact, we need to see this as the work itself. If there is one thing I’ve learned thus far in my career, it is that I am never not a librarian to others. While serving on a committee completely unrelated to libraries, my campus colleagues will take the opportunity to ask me a library-related question. Issues they see on television about libraries, such as book banning legislation and drag queen story hour, become an opportunity for them to ask how this affects my profession. Even at the store or the airport, strangers will ask me where something is located or how to find a particular item (and usually I can help). For whatever reason, they think I am approachable and possibly helpful, and I take those opportunities to connect, assist, and support. This is a special ability—a talent—that all librarians need to keep us relevant as higher education continues to evolve.

Courtney L. Young is University Librarian and co-director for the Hancock Commons at Colgate University. She graduated with a BA from The College of Wooster and earned a MS in Library Science from Simmons College (now University). Courtney has served in a variety of leadership roles in the American Library Association (ALA), including being elected the 2014-2015 ALA President. She is a recipient of the Simmons Alumni Achievement Award for Outstanding Achievement and Excellence in Library and Information Professional Endeavors. Courtney frequently presents and publishes on issues related to advocacy, academic librarianship, diversity, leadership, and professional development.

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**... people will never forget
how you made them feel.
– Maya Angelou**