

**The Future Academic Research Library:  
Hope/Power/Action through Primal Innovation and Radical Collaboration**

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Prognostic exercises offer opportunities to set aside reason, to avoid evidence, and to speculate with abandon. Academic research library futures are particularly challenging to define, as the community of interest is narrow and the implications of error are modest. Nevertheless, thinking about where we are going helps also to define speculation about where we are and where we have been. There are, in my view, only three continuous elements. First, we must have hope, believe in and aspire to expanding relevance and impact. Second, we must achieve power to have authority, influence, and respect. Third, we must focus less on ideas and more on action, getting things done. The two things we must advance are primal innovation, a basic commitment to risk and experimentation, and radical collaboration, deep and unprecedented partnerships. Renovation is grossly inadequate. Deconstruction is totally essential.

What do academic research libraries do? What are the core responsibilities? Information selection, acquisition, synthesis, navigation, distribution, interpretation, education, application, and preservation dominate. But new roles will shift the boundaries, expectations, and requirements. Traditional functions will be reengineered, eliminated, outsourced, and combined in new ways. Libraries will be aggregators, publishers, teachers, research and development agencies, entrepreneurs, and information policy advocates. Among the schizophrenic agendas of legacy, infrastructure, repository, gateway, enterprise, and public interest, what will survive and thrive?

In my talks over the last several years, I have outlined a set of thirty imperatives for the academic research library:

1. Build the campus telecommunications network for connectivity, reliability, capacity, performance, and security.
2. Participate in enterprise system development, and seek ways to reprogram the business, achieve greater productivity, integrate functions, customize services, and distribute work and services.
3. Manage identity and security to protect network efficiency and network operations, and to sustain data integrity and authorized access.
4. Organize disaster preparation and continuity to enable business recovery and effective records management.
5. Build the digital library through published/licensed content, primary and unique content, open web content, and institutional content increasingly multimedia, integrated with services, and with embedded tools and functionality.
6. Mine the full potential of digital information, enabling the rich searchability, collaboration, multimedia, linkability, interactivity, and dynamic nature of networked information.

7. Build content management portals, which support different types of information and workflows, and which serve as extensible integrations of real-time processes.
8. Preserve and archive the content, focusing on the persistence, curation, and stewardship of analog, digitized, and born-digital resources.
9. Assess carefully the role and impact of search engine libraries, and their attraction as the default tools for our users.
10. Enable and integrate Web 2.0 and 3.0 capabilities, recognizing the importance of social networking, collective intelligence, permanent beta, software as service, and the role of artificial intelligence and expert systems.
11. Enhance the student experience with technology ubiquity, web-based services, technology sandboxes, privacy spaces, support services, and postgraduate access.
12. Support the course management system in areas such as content creation and integration, content storage and organization, content distribution and access, and rights management.
13. Enhance the faculty experience by supporting personal advancement, contributions to scholarly literature, high-quality instructional experiences, work on innovative projects, collaboration with interesting colleagues, and excellent library and technology support.
14. Support the needs of big science in the areas of massive and unstructured data, which needs to be extracted and shared with distributed teams, and applied through visualization, stimulation, and experimentation.
15. Enrich research through text mining, extracting words or phrases, establishing meanings and patterns, and linking of objects.
16. Transform scholarly communication by advancing and supporting new electronic and business models, and new measures of quality and impact.
17. Advance the open revolutions of open source, open standards, open archives, open design, open linking, open knowledge, open courseware, and open access.
18. Advance the repository movement supporting access beyond the publisher source to embrace discipline, institutional, departmental, individual, government, and national repositories, managing for persistence and version control.
19. Advocate the information policy agenda in the critical areas of intellectual freedom, privacy, civil liberties, telecommunications, government information, and appropriations.
20. Fight the copyright wars, recognizing that international agreements, new laws and legislation, licensing of content, user guidelines, and digital rights management can undermine balance and threaten fair use.
21. Participate in the entrepreneurial academy by leveraging assets to advance new markets and new products and by building a culture of competition, risk, and innovation.
22. Support the globalization goals of the university through international collections, services to international students and researchers, and help to the global classroom and research collaborations.
23. Respond to user expectations, including more and better content, more and better access, convenience, individual and organizational productivity, new capabilities, cost reduction, and individual participation and control.
24. Prepare for accountability and assessment, the expectations of institutions and governments for new measures of user satisfaction, market penetration, success, impact, and cost-effectiveness. How do we measure academic research libraries' support of successful graduates, productive faculty, and efficient administrations?

25. Establish a research and development agenda to create new knowledge in support of risk taking, to enable a laboratory for experimentation, a magnet for new skills, to support technology transfer, and to attract federal, foundation, and corporate investment.
26. Rethink library space planning and identity to maximize flexibility and adaptability, and advance learning, social, intellectual, and collaborate spaces.
27. Develop new resources through fundraising, research grants, sale of products and services, recoverables and fees, co-investment with other libraries and academic departments, and public–private partnerships.
28. Promote new cooperation, not just in regional and national library projects, but also with researchers, publishers, technology, organizations, and businesses.
29. Develop the workforce with new recruitment and retention strategies, more attention to leadership development and succession planning, a stronger commitment to a diverse workforce, greater influence on professional education, and interesting and challenging professional assignments.
30. Build new organizational models that move away from administrative hierarchy and bureaucracy and embrace a centralized planning and resource allocation system, loosely coupled academic structures, and maverick and entrepreneurial enterprises.

To address these imperatives, what will be areas of strategic focus for the academic research library? I suggest the following: distributed electronic access to content, tools, and services; high-quality physical spaces; high-quality electronic spaces; special and distinctive collections; global collections; archiving of digital and analog content; innovative applications of technology in support of learning and research; high-quality technology infrastructure; staff development and professional engagement; leadership in information policy; new knowledge driven by research and development; and integration into the academic fabric of the university.

This strategic agenda will require that academic libraries pursue primal innovation, risk and experimentation at the fundamental core of the organizational mission and culture. And not just during periods of financial duress, or in response to grant opportunities, but as a fundamental value and capability. We need to stop acting like an information-poor information profession and treat the science of librarianship with new candor and capability.

The future academic research library must also radicalize the approach to collaboration, moving beyond the “kumbaya” of traditional resource sharing to embrace new strategies built on bi- and trilateral combinations, and incorporating sustainable business models, and new legal governance structures. The areas for working together might incorporate centers for excellence, mass production activities, new infrastructures, and new initiatives that are co-owned and co-administered. Replication must be set aside to free resources for primal innovation. The litmus test for success must reconsider advances in quality, productivity, and creativity.