Northeastern University Libraries

Strategic directions 2014-2018

The objective here is to gather together a set of broad initiatives, thrusts or philosophies that can serve as an agenda for the Library’s next round of strategic planning. The starting point for Library strategic planning needs to be the University’s Long Range Academic Plan http://www.northeastern.edu/lrp/resources/index.html with which all Library planning must be consistent.

The changing aspirations and growing research environment at Northeastern University demand that it have a commensurate research library of the same breadth, quality and global stature. Thus a particular aspiration of the Northeastern University Libraries should be to attain, within 10 years, levels of information resourcing and service delivery aligned with the benchmark requirements of membership status within the Association of Research Libraries. This goal carries with it significant resource and personnel implications, and would of course need to be addressed and approved by the University’s leadership.

Permeating the Library’s strategic directions for the next several years are several broad themes and values (represented here in shorthand) to which the Library and its staff adhere:

- User-centricity
- User privacy
- Innovation
- Preservation of unique knowledge
- Diversity and cultural competence
- Sustainability
- Assuring the Library’s continuing value to the University
- Assessment and assessability
- Deep and extensive collaboration
- Open access to information
- Respect for colleagues and co-workers

We are also aware of the internal and external context within which we embark on our strategic directions. Some of these environmental factors include:

- Constrained funding (at all levels)
- An institutional emphasis on outcomes assessment
- Hybrid Management: Library as a Cost Center ultimately dependent on and answerable to Revenue Centers (academic Colleges) for funding
- Paradigm shifts: “sage on the stage” to “guide by the side”; knowledge consumption to knowledge creation; Just-in-Case to Just-in-Time to Just-for-Me; etc.
- Social context of discovery and learning
The following are strategic directions that can guide the Library’s work for the next several years and in which context it can develop annual action plans. These strategies must be evaluated periodically, both internally and externally, to ensure that the Library through its staff keeps its pulse on the University and research/teaching environments and adjust the Library’s goals accordingly.

1. User Experience
   a. Personalized Services – As the Library moves into a heavily online information environment, it needs to develop services that both engage with users at the point where they encounter and create information, and also promote new approaches to information and media literacy. This will include a shift towards online tutorials, interactive/intelligent reference guides, “My Librarian” personalized services, and various synchronous and asynchronous means of working face-to-face and virtually with individuals and groups. Personalized support for faculty members and researchers will need to be developed for delivery through new digital scholarship services.

   b. Instruction – The Library will transition from mostly traditional in-person, class-based information literacy sessions to an instruction program that more closely aligns with University-supported research-based methods, to be developed in collaboration with the Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning through Research (CATLR), CPS, academic departments, and other centers of expertise in learning support on campus. These components will encompass media and other emerging information platforms, such as visualization and data based information.

   c. Multiple Modes of Delivery – The Library needs to develop the processes for ensuring that the content it manages is device- and location-agnostic. This might include development of a formal usability process, more intense negotiation with vendors (and with IS with regard to VPN and related technologies), and greater emphasis on mobility as it impacts technology, user preferences, and communication with the Library’s users. At the same time, the Library should explore and support new technologies such as virtual teaching, virtual reality, gesture-based computing, and educational
gaming, and develop virtual engagement environments in venues with the greatest likelihood of student uptake.

d. **Needs Assessment** - The Library must engage users individually and in aggregate to determine unmet needs and identify gaps in awareness about library offerings, and recommend directions for new offerings.

e. **Promotion and Communication** - In response to needs assessment and market research, the Library will direct promotion toward raising awareness about library offerings, using creative new media and traditional tools. These communications will open a wider space for dialogue with users that the Library can use as inspiration for new programs and services.

2. **Research Services**

a. **Researcher Engagement** – All Library staff are encouraged to more actively engage in the research and scholarly life of the faculty and students the Library supports, taking careful note of the impact on the nature of research occasioned by the online environment and new approaches to research collaboration. This extends beyond Research & Instruction (R&I) librarians. Metadata specialists, for example, might work with Northeastern faculty and students helping them prepare their materials for deposition in the Digital Repository Service (DRS) or other appropriate scholarly repositories. Library Technology Services (LTS), R&I, and Digital Media Commons staff will, in collaboration with Information Services (IS), develop and offer workshops on emerging scholarly technologies and tools. In conjunction with its partners in the Digital Scholarship Commons, the Library’s digital scholarship group (DSG) will undertake a program of applied research in emerging areas of digital scholarship and will offer training, project management and other services to faculty and doctoral students in these areas.

b. **Scholarly Communication** - The Library will continue to advocate for changes to traditional scholarly communication models, particularly for open access deposit of scholarly output in DRS. It should collaborate with other organizations and individuals to respond to copyright issues such as author rights, fair use rights, and orphan works, and to implement new publishing platforms and services. The Library will aim to develop a service plan to support a researcher discovery service (VIVO) that includes connections to administrative and other data sources.
c. **Data Management Services** – The Library will develop a wide-ranging and flexible data management program that offers a range of services from simple (assistance with grant-writing requirements) to practical (depositing/versioning tools that allow faculty to work with their data in the DRS during their research) to “boutique” (developing customized data access portals atop the DRS framework).

3. **University Expansion & Community Engagement**
   a. **Campus Expansion** – The Library should factor into all critical decisions their impact on students and faculty who are located remotely from the Boston campus. This will require different models for information delivery, provision of information resources, service engagement, and assessment in many areas of Library activity.

   b. **Cultural Competency** - The Library will develop the cultural competency of staff members and the organization as a whole, with an emphasis on assuring equally sensitive and appropriate service and civility to all members of the University’s diverse and increasingly international community.

   c. **Community Outreach and Engagement** - the Library will explore specific ways in which it can adopt a strong, leading position in building partnerships and services with communities beyond the campus.

4. **Collections and Resources**
   a. **Electronic Collections** – the Library should complete the transition from an e-preferred to e-only (with appropriate exceptions) collections policy. As funding permits, legacy print materials should be converted to online versions, preferably as part of a coordinated consortial strategy. Major emphasis will be placed on providing powerful yet intuitive interfaces to digital information, whether “owned” by the Library or not, and on promoting discovery of Library resources wherever the user starts his or her search. The Library will also help to support the emerging digital humanities and computational social sciences programs with the provision or recommendation of digital resources appropriate for data mining.

   b. **Demand-driven Acquisitions** – the Library should concentrate on providing access to information which is immediately required by the patron or in direct support of the curriculum, through models such as patron-driven acquisitions, purchase on demand, faculty requests, etc. Academic libraries can no longer afford to build “just-in-case” collections that often are not used. Local resource-sharing networks and collaborative purchasing will continue to be explored and expanded.
c. **Purchase Models** – the Library will work with colleges and departments to develop hybrid management-based models for the purchase, lease or cost-sharing of major information resources required mostly by one revenue center on campus.

d. **Archives and Special Collections** – the Library will identify and promote specific special collection/archives foci with closer ties to the teaching and research mission of the university and aggressively seek funding opportunities to develop these collections. It will identify interdisciplinary themes in archival and special collections material (e.g. health, social justice) that closely align with the major emphases of the University and promote these to the faculty. It will greatly expand its related teaching functions and integrate materials with class projects. The digitization of the Library’s unique resources (and the preservation of originals) and their access/promotion will remain a high priority.

e. **University Digital Repository** – The Library will continue to expand the Digital Repository Service (DRS) by more fully engaging the widest possible spectrum of campus constituencies to assess needs and areas for innovation. Through the participation of appropriate library staff, the Library will develop procedures and policies to ensure that a) content is deposited in preservation-friendly formats, with appropriate metadata, and b) all due diligence is given to ensuring the preservation and long-term access to and use of this content. This includes working with Information Technology Services on developing auditing systems, storage allocation and business models. In a more general sense, full support of DRS by all library staff will further ensure its success.

5. **Technology**

a. **Systems** – The Library must continually investigate and implement systems and interfaces that best support its strategic directions, fulfill the research needs and behavioral expectations of its users, and streamline its work. These systems should also support the development of collaborative collection development, technical processing and resource-sharing networks.

b. **Integration** – The Library must better integrate its systems (bibliographic, technical, and financial) with related systems on campus and external discovery systems. This may mean a new approach to the relationship between the business systems of the Library’s Integrated Library System (Alma) as well as more direct integration with Blackboard and Banner.
c. **Collaboration** – The Library will collaborate across campus in areas of mutual concern, such as developing/implementing/supporting e-portfolio or electronic dissertation submission systems, expanding authentication and authorization tools to encourage collaboration across and beyond the campus, and integrating provision of reference service in online classes. The Library should seek partner institutions wherever appropriate.

d. **Innovation and experimentation** – The Library’s staff should aggressively investigate, develop (as appropriate) and implement cutting-edge software solutions that best meet the needs of its patrons and staff. The Library needs to be technically nimble and focus on the unique needs of the Northeastern community to determine a technology road map, and should develop partnerships with campus and external partners that allow Northeastern to be viewed as a leader in the innovative use of academic and library technology.

6. **Space**

a. **Rebalancing Library Space** – As more collections become digital, less library space will be needed to house physical collections and more will be needed for users accessing and working with digital collections. In response to surveys, newly available space should be used preferentially to restore quiet study space. Additional space should be used to support innovative new modes of collaborative work and knowledge creation.

b. **Library as Intellectual Center** - The Library will strengthen its role as an intellectual center on campus in hosting performances, lectures, and exhibits. The Library will also provide a central focus and accompanying services for scholars engaging in digital and media projects.

c. **Shared Print Repository** – Much of the remaining print collection will preferentially be housed either in on-site compact storage or in a shared repository with delivery within 24 hours. (e.g. via participation in the creation of a New England Regional Shared Print Repository.) At the same time, the Library will work to find and implement virtual surrogates for the elements of browsing and serendipity associated with tradition on-site print collections.

7. **Staffing**
a. **Realignment to New Work** – The Library will undertake a critical review of its staffing models and associated workflows appropriate to the context of a modern academic research library. This may include a move to collaborative staffing with other institutions.

b. **Developing Library Staff** - The Library will develop and encourage a culture of continuous education and improvement, emphasizing project management skills, discipline knowledge, research support, technical, and public service skills as appropriate. A special emphasis will need to be placed on developing new expert skills and positions that properly support research and higher level learning in conjunction with University needs, e.g. GIS coordination, data/statistics expertise, visual resource management. This will require collaboration with academic departments to identify, advocate for, fund, and assess these positions, but will also offer opportunities for these new Digital Scholarship Commons-based services to be melded into the University curricula and research. In addition, the Library and individual staff should seek opportunities for service on campus committees and participation in campus life.

8. **Assessment**
   a. **Data Gathering and Analysis** – To create an outstanding user experience and support data-driven decision-making that is responsive to user needs, the Library will analyze user preferences and behavior, as well as outside trends and factors affecting library programs and services. The development of a Library component of the University’s Business Intelligence initiative, and collaboration with CATLR and the Office of Institutional Research will be key elements of this effort. A communications component will support continuous feedback with library stakeholders.

   b. **Outcomes and Outputs** - Library Assessment will focus on exploring and strengthening the contribution of Library use to student learning and retention outcomes, and on supporting the cost-effectiveness of library operations.

9. **Funding and Development**
   a. **Advancement** – to implement these Strategic Directions will require the realignment of existing Library resources. The Library will need to move aggressively to identify and secure diverse sources of funds or revenue including: intensified identification of new donors, active participation in the University’s upcoming Capital Campaign, the exploration of naming and sponsorship opportunities provided by
new and existing Library spaces, and the more effective cultivation and development of existing donor contacts.

b. **Other Funding Sources** – the Library should focus more closely on opportunities for cost-sharing based on the mechanisms available through the Hybrid Management framework, on increased identification and more effective preparation and submission of grant applications, and on other innovative approaches (e.g. using the Digital Media Common as a venue for business/idea incubator space.)

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