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A pulse on the world of academic libraries

Six regions, six insights

Transformation in higher education, emerging technologies, and globalization are some of the forces driving change in academic libraries around the globe. Are academic libraries grappling with the same issues worldwide or do their local contexts present distinct concerns?

In order to learn how academic libraries are doing, academic librarians from each world region were asked to share what they thought were the five issues (challenges, opportunities, concerns, developments, etc.) most impacting the future of academic libraries in their region. A regional comparison revealed several issues that overlapped across regions:

1. Student learning and success: Asia and Oceania, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America.

2. Access to scientific communication: Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America.

3. Library and Information Science (LIS) education gap: Africa, Gulf, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

4. Grappling with technology: Africa and the Gulf.

5. Research data management: Europe and North America.

6. Communicating and demonstrating value: Asia and Oceania, and North America.

Issues that are being encountered in specific regions and not in others, include:

- **Africa:** Underfunding, and nominal support from leaders

- **Asia and Oceania:** Sustainable development in academic libraries

- **Europe:** Digital learning

- **Gulf:** Meeting international standards, and access to local language content

- **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Information access policies

- **North America:** A diverse and inclusive profession

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Africa: Contending Issues in Academic Library Services—Godwin B. Afebende, Cross River State University (Nigeria)

The history of formal academic libraries in Africa is recent, traced to the coming of colonialism, church missionaries, and Western education. British colonists commissioned the establishment of libraries in West Africa, while the Italians pioneered this effort in East Africa.

The proliferation of academic libraries, starting in the late 1950s, is a result of post-colonial developments in education with the objectives to promote education for emancipation and self-reliance, encourage African authorship, and promote cultural/indigenous development. While academic libraries have received attention in African library development, they contend with issues that impact their ability to deliver 21st-century library services:

1. Lack of technology infrastructure and equipment to embrace new information services.
2. Gross underfunding of education and library services.
3. High cost of information and communication technology, infrastructure, and digital information resources limit the provision of e-resources, emerging technologies, and high-speed Internet.
4. Nominal support from leaders, unstable governments, weak structures, corruption, underfunding of education, and inability to hold leaders accountable often lead to policy and fiscal failure.
5. Library and information science (LIS) is a relatively new discipline and not yet grounded in higher education and offered in few institutions. As a result, there are inadequately skilled professionals. Less than 20% of higher education institutions in Africa presently offer programs in LIS.

The LIS community recognizes the above issues and is willing to tackle them, so we are seeing Africa turn the corner.

Growing national, regional, and international networks, and collaborative efforts are being initiated to mobilize funds, grants, and donations to build infrastructure, procure equipment, and develop capacities, especially IT skill-based competencies.

Asia and Oceania: Sustainable and influential academic libraries—Leo F. H. Ma, The Chinese University of Hong Kong (China)

Echoing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted on September 25, 2015, by the United Nations General Assembly, *sustainability* is one of the key foci among the academic libraries in Asia and Oceania. Major conferences were held to address the issue of sustainable development in academic libraries as a long-term strategic development. Jointly hosted by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library and the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library June 2-3, 2016, the theme of this international Academic Librarian conference series was “Academic Librarian 4—Sustainable Academic Libraries: Now and Beyond.” There were four subthemes at this conference namely Sustainable Environment, Sustainable Resources, Sustainable Technologies, and Sustainable Services, which encompass the major roles and services of academic libraries in terms of sustainable development.

Shortly after this meeting, another major conference on sustainability was held in mainland China. The theme of the 2016 Academic Library Development Forum, organized by the Society for Academic Library of the Library Society of China, held June 15-17, 2016, was “Opportunities and Challenges: The Strategy and Practice of Sustainable Development of University Libraries.”

Topics such as sustainable library development and planning, outreaching services, staff development, revitalizing library space, as well as other sustainable

library issues, were reported and discussed in this annual conference. Apart from sustainability, there has been an increasing emphasis on the way in which academic libraries can facilitate student learning and success, increase the impact to the university community and beyond, advocate their value and relevance in higher education, and engage stakeholders to influence the society in the Asia and Oceania region.

**Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
Countries: Academic library
experiences and cooperation
—Mohamed Mubarak, Hamad Bin
Khalifa University (Qatar)**

The growth of libraries in the six Arab GCC countries started during the 1970s as a result of substantial investments in education, research, and development. This wholesale expansion necessitated the employment of a large corps of professional librarians, especially in the academic setting. From the 1970s to the 1990s, young nationals were sent to North American and British universities on scholarship. Meanwhile, libraries grew very quickly in numbers, resources, and sophisticated services.

GCC academic libraries contribute significantly to supporting both the learning process and research activities in universities in the Gulf region. They are facing different challenges in the 21st century, five of which are:

1. Moving from traditional information service by employing emerging technologies to access, search, discover, retrieve, and use information in a knowledge economy.
2. Adapting and developing new services that use web 2.0 technologies.
3. Meeting international standards of professional practice, such as Competencies for Information Professionals of the Special Library Association (SLA).
4. Addressing gaps in LIS education and skills.
5. Increasing access to Arabic language content.

For the last 25 years, the SLA-Arabian Gulf Chapter (SLA-AGC) has played an important role in developing librarians and information professionals in the GCC, promoting best practices, establishing strategic partnerships with key information stakeholders in the Gulf region, and helping academic librarians to develop their skills by offering continuing education (CE) activities. CE is filling in the knowledge gap of academic librarians because some of the regional LIS schools' graduates lack the proficiency in a number of major professional topics like web 2.0. The need for scientific scholarship, as well as LIS professional literature in Arabic, is being tackled by academic librarians, along with other SLA-AGC members. They are working with Arabic publishers and vendors to develop new Arabic scholarly content that supports international emerging technologies (content and software) and to translate LIS professional literature into Arabic.

**European university libraries: A long
road ahead—Adelaida Ferrer Torrens,
Universidad de Barcelona (Spain)**

In identifying five areas that are impacting European university libraries, I wish to start off with student services. Libraries are providing space for group learning and creativity, changing traditional library services, and creating applications that provide access to resources virtually. Recognizing that users can access more and more information and applications through their smart phones, major European libraries are needing to provide such emerging technologies.

Digital learners present university libraries with a new area of services to develop, which has resulted in synergies between libraries and computer services across different universities. For example, the ability to provide users with a certification in CI2 (Computer and Information Skills), strengthens the role of university libraries.

The current support for open access by academic institutions has seen research

libraries involved in various activities. On the one hand, they are strengthening institutional repositories and creating services to facilitate self-archiving by researchers and, on the other, they are supporting the transition to the golden path of open access that includes initiatives to offset the costs of publication.

Furthermore, libraries have the new challenge of helping researchers to manage research data. Research funding institutions, especially the European Commission, have set targets requiring researchers to facilitate access to data that lead to publication. Academic libraries should be prepared to help not only publish the data but to manage them throughout the research cycle and beyond.

The fifth area of action is the European Union's current work on modifying the European framework for intellectual property. This development is aligned with the aim of libraries to support the interests of researchers committed to improving existing copyright exceptions, making them common and binding for all member states.

There are many challenges ahead for European academic libraries, especially to position them as units of "impact" within their universities, proactive, and able to envision future trends in higher education.

**Latin America and the Caribbean:
A region of contrasts—Sueli Mara
Soares Pinto Ferreira, University of
Sao Paulo (Brazil)**

Latin America and the Caribbean is known for its various open access initiatives for scientific production and also, paradoxically, for its concentration of countries with no or few limitations and exceptions to copyright and related rights for libraries, that are needed to offer equitable access to information in the current digital age.

We observe, on the one hand, large academic libraries in the region focused on the local, national, and regional development of institutional repositories, journal por-

als, and platforms for publishing ebooks, seeking to participate in a more active way in the current universe of scholarly publication and scientific communication. However, on the other hand, there are still no information access policies to provide open, equitable, and affordable access to knowledge or scientific production. Thus, academic libraries in close collaboration with public, popular, and specialized libraries are being called to defend and promote national and regional public policies for social progress, with special attention to the issue of copyright.

Academic libraries in the region face the challenge of training their staff in order to transform them to be: a) agents of change, b) content curators, c) active editors of institutional knowledge production, d) public policies managers, and e) legal advisers to review contracts and licenses to ensure legal compliance in digital preservation, lending between local and international libraries, and acquisition, among other activities.

In the region, academic libraries are positioning themselves to offer more appropriate support to the educational mission of their institutions, with proposals for alternative educational models and programs for development of computer and media skills, appropriate to an academic community. Providing ongoing support is important to prepare students for lifelong learning and success.

Lastly, in this context with its contrasts, a recurring and important regional issue is the scarcity of librarians and professional library and information science education.

**North American university libraries:
At the heart of the academy—Gerald
Beasley, University of Alberta
(Canada)**

Academic libraries in Canada and the United States are transforming, acting on the changes they are seeing in research, teaching, and learning in higher education. First, we are improving the student

experience, including personal safety. This will continue to be a key concern of our academic libraries.

A high proportion of North American universities need to maximize research dollars as well as tuition fee revenues, so our future is also closely connected to our ability to support this increasingly multidisciplinary, global, technology-based enterprise. Shifting resources towards effective research data management and addressing the prohibitive cost of providing access to scholarly content are two big structural challenges that researchers, students, and administrators all want us to solve. Unless we find effective ways to lobby our content providers and legislatures, we will be doing so in an unhelpful copyright and licensing environment.

Such issues should be tackled by consortia, associations, and ad hoc groups working together at the network level. The Internet provides us unprecedented opportunity to seek out new partnerships, local and international, with those who share our values but achieve them in different ways. We will be better placed to excel if we are

a diverse and inclusive profession that has moved beyond the tradition of minimizing our differences and is ready to take its next steps on the difficult but fruitful path to true intercultural competency.

Lastly, in order to hold on to the resources granted to us, we need to communicate our value, which is a critical challenge in a world where information is both too cheap and too expensive at the same time. North American academic libraries have no birth-right to their traditional place at the heart of the academy—though I strongly believe they can continue to earn it.

Conclusion

These insights provided by six librarians represent a snapshot in the world of academic libraries rather than a survey of the field. The similarities and differences enable us to continue an international conversation and reveal areas of needed support and opportunities for collaboration. These insights offer a view from the ground, that exhibit the authors' experiences with academic libraries and their professional engagement. *ZZ*

("ACRL's 2017 Awards Program," continues from page 381)

Scholarship and Research): €2,500 grant supports research in European studies with an emphasis on librarianship, the book trade, resource documentation, and similar information-science related topics.

Publications

• **Katharine Kyes Leab and Daniel J. Leab Exhibition Catalogue Awards** (sponsored by Katharine Kyes Leab and Daniel J. Leab, American Book Prices Current): Recognizes outstanding catalogs published by American or Canadian institutions in conjunction with library exhibitions. Deadline: October 15, 2016.

• **Ilene F. Rockman Instruction Publication of the Year Award** (sponsored by Emerald Group Publishing Limited): \$3,000

to recognize an outstanding publication related to instruction in a library environment published in the last two years.

• **Science and Technology Section Oberly Award for Bibliography in the Agricultural or Natural Sciences:** This biennial award is given in odd-numbered years for the best English-language bibliography in the field of agriculture or a related science.

If you would like more information about the ACRL 2017 Awards Program, visit the "Awards & Scholarships" section of our website at www.acrl.org or contact ACRL Program Coordinator Chase Ollis at collis@ala.org.

We welcome your nominations and look forward to celebrating achievements in academic librarianship in 2017. *ZZ*