

Academic Libraries: New Directions, New Partners

7th International Bielefeld Conference

February 4, 2004

ABSTRACT:

As university libraries move beyond our recent intense efforts to build the technological infrastructure that will enable us to take full advantage of digital technology, we must now focus on the new directions, services and partners that will enable us fully to capitalize on our investments. This paper outlines some of the recent developments in the United States in general and at Johns Hopkins University in particular that suggest ways in which we are beginning to “think beyond digital libraries.”

I feel honored to have been asked to participate in this 7th international Bielefeld conference, whose theme brings forcefully to our attention the great opportunity those of us who now lead and work in academic libraries face: namely, how should we build on our recent intense - and costly - efforts to develop robust technological infrastructures to design our information strategies for the next decade. This is precisely the question we have been facing at Johns Hopkins - not just within the libraries, but within the entire university. The process of engaging this question is requiring our staff, faculty and university administration to look at new directions and new partners for the libraries, not just to capitalize on our recent investments in support of our academic mission but also to generate revenues for those past investments and for those that will inevitably be required in the future: all of us hope to make constant progress, but we also know we’re never done.

Before describing some of the tactics we envision as part of our information strategy for the 2005-2010 period, I want to offer a modest disclaimer based on my fairly recent arrival in the world of academic librarianship. I immediately found the theme of this conference compelling, for the reason I stated above; and it was easy to think of the title for my paper and some of the new directions and partnerships I wanted to discuss. But as I was flying here earlier this week, I felt a momentary panic when I realized that everything in academic libraries feels new to me, because it is! You can surmise by looking, and from the resume on the conference website, that I am not a young professional; but after working 30 years in a national library, and deciding last year to uproot myself and move to a new professional world, I still feel very much like the college freshman for whom everything is both new and possible. So I hope you will forgive me if some of the activities I describe don’t seem all that new to you veteran academic librarians; I take comfort in the belief that it can sometimes be salutary to be reminded even of the familiar.

Rather than focusing in depth on one particular new direction, I thought it might be helpful to cite briefly a fairly wide range of initiatives that involve new directions and/or partners for Johns Hopkins and/or the larger American academic library community. I know from my long involvement in international library activities that it is difficult to predict which ideas are exportable, and certainly inappropriate to suggest what ought to be done in different environments. So I offer some examples of ways we are preparing for our future, and will be happy to talk with or provide further information to any of you who are interested in specific activities.

I will begin with the Entrepreneurial Library Program (ELP) at Johns Hopkins (<http://www.library.jhu.edu/elp>) because it represents several of the new directions and partners that are critical for our future. The Entrepreneurial Library Program was established shortly before my arrival at Johns Hopkins, so I take no credit for the idea; but I was immediately intrigued by it. Initially, I found the whole title and concept foreign. For years we had been attempting at the Library of Congress to gain Congressional approval to initiate some very modest revenue-generation activities, only to be rebuffed again and again (until the surprising moment at one Congressional hearing when the new committee chair suddenly asked why we were not doing more!), so it was a shock to find a unit in my new library publicly and proudly bearing this title. But I could very quickly see ways in which a program that was designed to serve one particular need - the necessity for generating revenue - could be turned to multiple advantages as we map our future.

The chief goal of the Entrepreneurial Library Program was to generate revenue for the libraries' operating expenses; the activity that generated the revenue was the creation of a virtual library for a virtual university. This activity is replicable; otherwise I would not be mentioning it; but the Johns Hopkins culture was a uniquely fertile ground in which it could grow. The three highest compliments one can be paid at Johns Hopkins are to be called smart, a team player and entrepreneurial. All deans and other senior managers are expected to be constantly thinking of new frontiers - and finding funds to pay for settling there. Furthermore, the libraries are not funded centrally by the President and Provost, but rely upon funds from (1) the nine degree-granting schools, such as Arts and Sciences; (2) endowment; and (3) revenue generating activities. As the schools that supply the bulk of our funds are constantly focused on ways of raising their own revenues, they expect that the libraries will be similarly motivated. So this is the context in which the ELP was conceived.

What is interesting and instructive, however, are the ways in which this fairly straightforward program has evolved. The initial "product" was the design, implementation and management of virtual library services for a virtual university, Excelsior College. ELP is now providing this service for two additional virtual universities, and is in discussion with several others. The ELP staff create completely customized virtual libraries, appropriately branded; they are designed to provide exceptional and cost effective information services and to meet all applicable accreditation and licensing standards. Each client determines the "look and feel" it desires, the areas of instruction to be covered, and particularly the level of personal service it expects from the ELP staff. Increasingly the virtual university clients understand, and seem eager to pay for, both online and in-person (via telephone) reference services.

The revenue generated by these virtual libraries has in turn enabled us to fulfill very rapidly a secondary strategic objective of the ELP: attracting and retaining a diverse, technologically-adept and forward-looking work force. This program and its staff have in effect become an in-house laboratory for the development of interactive, online delivery mechanisms for library services. ELP staff spend several hours each week working at the reference desk in our main library, fulfilling their desire to have regular in-person contact with library colleagues and patrons, and fulfilling management's desire to infect the entire staff with the entrepreneurial spirit that is vital to the continuing success of our whole enterprise.

What makes this direction particularly exciting to me is the unexpected impact it has had on our ability to enlist new partners. One important source of revenue for us that had not been adequately maintained was contributions from the alumni "general fund" to the libraries. In making my orientation rounds to various campus colleagues, I discovered that for various reasons

the relationship between the libraries and alumni had not been adequately cultivated; but rather than begging for help, I could offer it, thanks to ELP.

I knew that a few US academic libraries, such as Cornell, had recently been extending online library services designed for faculty and students to alumni, so I suggested that Johns Hopkins try a similar approach. Thus began a new partnership between the libraries and the Development Office that is already paying big dividends for both. Together our offices developed a questionnaire to be sent to a large sampling of alumni, testing interest in general and specific electronic resources - as well as willingness to pay. The overwhelmingly enthusiastic response was more surprising to the Alumni Office than to the libraries, but it was sufficient to induce the Alumni Office to pay ELP all of its costs for developing and implementing the alumni online library and to agree to a 50-50 share of any profits. I am happy to report that, less than a year after our first conversation about the project, our beta site for 5,000 alumni went live on Monday. Through "Hopkins Knowledgenet" all alumni will have free access to a huge array of electronic resources - books, newspapers, and journals, including all the journals published through Project Muse. Additionally, for a fee of only \$125 annually, alumni can have access to every electronic resource we have available for faculty and enrolled students as well as reference assistance (via email or phone) from ELP librarians.

Despite the initial enthusiastic response to our survey, the Alumni Office and I were bit apprehensive when we headed for our first meeting with the large, business-savvy alumni board last fall. When hands started waving in the air before we could finish our presentation we both thought we were in trouble. But it quickly became apparent that all the questions were going to be about how we could extend the offering beyond our alumni and beyond the resources we had already envisioned, and it's been smooth sailing since.

It's too early to have reactions from real users, but contributions designated for the libraries have already increased, based on the heightened visibility "Knowledgenet" has given us; the Development Office sees the libraries in a different light (as a fund-raising asset rather than black hole for funds); and we also have a new, large, friendly market for the retail sales program we have begun to develop - yet another new direction.

Finally, the ELP has given us a business model and expertise base from which to launch two additional fee-based services. One is providing contract information services to the corporate sector, primarily in the Baltimore-Washington region that is full of small entrepreneurial companies particularly in the info-tech and bio-tech fields - such as the Consumer Health Research Report Service. For these companies, ELP is in effect becoming their out-of-house special library, offering customized information profiling for clients, competitive intelligence, and other information. The second is Hopkins Personal Librarian, a name ELP has trademarked, which offers in-depth research to individuals (not Hopkins students!) on an ad hoc basis or as part of one of our other virtual library services. The experience gained by ELP has also been indispensable to us in planning library services for the Hopkins faculty who are engaged in face-to-face teaching but in geographically-dispersed areas.

I have devoted great attention to the Entrepreneurial Library Program because I think it illustrates so well the ways in which our investment in technology, and tech-savvy staff, have prepared us to move in new and often unpredicted business directions, with new partners, to solve multiple problems. Now I would like to turn to a very different issue for academic libraries: our relationships with publishers.

I have no intention of going into a generalized rant about today's issues in scholarly communication. There are other conferences - lots of them - to attend on this challenge. Instead

I want us to be reminded that librarians and publishers are and always have been partners in the chain that links creators and readers and to think about positive ways of re-enforcing, even re-building, that partnership when we can. It is hard to imagine a successful information strategy for the next decade that does not seek positively to engage our chief information supplier.

In this vein, I am very happy about and supportive of the recent joint venture of the US Association of Research Libraries and the Association of American University Presses, which have designated 2004 "The Year of the University Press." This campaign has been launched, as one would expect in 2004, with the establishment of a website: <http://aaupnet.org/arlaaup>

As the announcement states, "the campaign is intended to celebrate the contributions university presses make to scholarship, the university community and society." It is especially designed to build on the collaborative ventures between the libraries and presses that fly under the same university flag but have not always worked well, or at all, together. Of course, there are exceptions - such as MIT - in which the university library and press report to the university librarian; but this and a very few others in the US are indeed the exceptions. To highlight the complementary nature of our roles, the new website features examples of collaborative projects from ARL libraries - about a dozen were included at the time of the launch. While many of these partnerships are naturally centered on electronic initiatives, others are more traditional. An example, is the partnership between the University of North Carolina library and press to produce a print Encyclopedia of North Carolina History, to be followed by online version in several years.

Not only will the website list collaborative activities, so that we can see what our colleagues are up to, but it will also list ideas for exhibits, events and programs and then follow up with summaries of the results, both planned and unexpected. The desired outcome is not just another "one-off" campaign, but, as ARL Executive Director Duane Webster said at the launch, building the increased understanding, communication and comfort levels between us that are "critical to ensuring effective partnerships in creating future systems."

The libraries at Johns Hopkins have a strong interest in this initiative, and in fact had already implemented one of the ARL-recommended projects before this campaign was developed - the libraries last year mounted a major exhibition to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Johns Hopkins Press, the oldest university press in America. This was a fine project; but our main strategic focus needs to be on the symbiotic nature of our relationship and the well-established principle of building on strength. For us, this means strong engagement in the development of Project Muse, which was launched in 1995 by the Hopkins library and press through a grant the library received from the Mellon Foundation. Initially, the aim of Project Muse was simply to offer the full text of journals published by the JHU Press via the web. But in 1999, Muse expanded to become a unique partnership of not-for-profit publishers, chiefly other university presses and academic societies, to publish e-versions of their journals, chiefly in the humanities, arts and social sciences - similar to what Highwire Press has done in the sciences.

I firmly believe that the main reason Muse is so often hailed for its library-friendly licensing and usage policies, easy navigation, and reasonable pricing is that it was conceived within the library, which made it very customer-focused; but it would likely not have flourished as it has had it not been transformed early on into a partnership with the Press, which had essential complementary expertise. The library is devoting considerable attention to nurturing this relationship - e.g., by assigning our bibliographers to work with faculty to identify gaps in subject coverage, by joining with Muse staff to talk to librarians in venues such as ALA, and by engaging specialists in our Digital Knowledge Center, which I will discuss in more detail shortly, to undertake some of the applied research, development and testing activities that we are

specially equipped to perform. It is true that some part of this collaborative effort is based on our wanting to be a good campus citizen - to help the "home team" perform well. But leaders in the profession need also think about how local strategic objectives relate to our broader strategic interests. As I personally have very little patience with generalized whining or exhortation, I view the Hopkins' libraries role vis-a-vis our Press and Project Muse as an opportunity to help model for the larger community the kind of partnership libraries and publishers must have if we are going to make satisfactory progress in our goal of getting for our users the information they need, in the way and when they want it, and at a sustainable cost.

One of my current tasks, as Chair of IFLA's Copyright and Other Legal Matters Committee and a member of the IFLA-International Publishers Association Committee is to draft, with a representative of the publishers, a joint statement, "Views on the Role of Libraries and Publishers in Licensing and Rights Clearance"; to be followed, if we can pull off the first miracle, by a joint statement on the "Role of Libraries and Publishers in the Information Society." I thrived at the Library of Congress for 30 years by remaining a "cock-eyed optimist," and so, having just been given this assignment - and asked to give a presentation on this general issue at the IPA annual meeting in Berlin in June! - I am determinedly optimistic. But that optimism is grounded very much in the concrete experience I have gained at Johns Hopkins in dealing directly with a publisher - a sympathetic one to be sure; but still a publisher with urgent bottom-line imperatives that must inform the dialog in this contentious arena. If we can reach agreement on general principles, grounded in local reality, perhaps we can lower the decibel level of the confrontation between academic libraries and certain publishers that, in the United States at least, is impeding progress in our strategic planning.

One of the library units of which I am most proud is our Digital Knowledge Center, which is the applied research and development center within our libraries.

<http://www.dkc.jhu.edu>

Again I take no responsibility for having conceived this function as an integral part of our libraries' operations, but I am grateful that my predecessor foresaw the benefit of moving in this new direction. While most of us could cite success stories as well as horror stories about our libraries' engagement with separate, centralized information technology centers, my brief experience with the DKC, a small cadre of professional computer scientists and engineers with a profound interest in library issues and services, convinces me that having this expertise embedded firmly in the library must remain an indispensable component of our long-term information strategy. Selecting, scanning, and providing metadata for library resources are becoming "routine," albeit very important, tasks in academic libraries, which is all the more reason we need to pay more attention to developing digital workflow management systems that will reduce the amount of human labor required for large-scale digitization and publishing projects. And we need to devote much more attention, as service providers, to rigorous testing of the usability of the resources we are spending so much to create. These are the primary areas in which the DKC has worked to date.

One example of the DKC's work is the CAPM (Comprehensive Access to Printed Materials) project, whose goal is to develop cost-effective access to remotely shelved materials, using a web interface and fully automated robotic system for on-demand search, retrieval and batch-scanning of print materials. <http://dkc.mse.jhu.edu/CAPM> The first phase of this project, a collaboration among library staff, engineers and economists, has resulted in a prototype retrieval robot that can be highly useful to us and the numerous other libraries that are building off-site print repositories, and we are now turning our efforts in the direction of marketing, a skill

that too few librarians have or revere.

A further challenge that the DKC is moving aggressively to address is the naive, but flattering expectation that many on our faculty have that the library will be willing and able to serve as data curators for the large-scale scientific data-sets they are busily building, just as we have traditionally “curated” their print output. In response to a request from a renowned astronomer on our faculty, we are seeking funding for a major project focused on the National Virtual Observatory, an international collaboration that is gathering unimaginably large amounts of data to realize the astronomers’ vision of using astronomical data repositories as virtual observatories. <http://www.us-vo.org> This is not necessarily a role that every academic library needs to prepare to fulfill, but we need to be thinking about how we can collectively perform our traditional roles with new forms of scholarly output lest we eventually be marginalized.

While we prepare for the future, we also must be cognizant of our clients’ immediate information needs, one of the most pressing of which on our campus has been for professional advice on how to use digital technology for effective packaging and presentation of instructional materials in the classroom. To respond to this demand the library’s Center for Educational Resources was created. <http://www.library.jhu.edu/dli/about/index> Comprising scholars, librarians and instructional technology experts, the CER staff work side-by-side - and very diplomatically - with faculty, helping them extend their instructional impact through the integration of digital technologies and innovative teaching strategies. It has been interesting to observe how rapidly faculty have come to expect and acknowledge this new direction in librarianship - the addition of content creating/presentation skills to our traditional functions of acquiring, organizing, describing, etc. - and how little attention our schools of librarianship are paying to this burgeoning requirement. Demand for this assistance has so far outstripped our ability to supply it that the library has taken the novel step of awarding technology fellowships to faculty, enabling them to develop new technology-based teaching tools and strategies that they are then required to share with their colleagues.

Examples of projects created by the library in this new partnership of equals with humanities faculty are the Levy Collection of Sheet Music (<http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu>) and Le Roman de la Rose (<http://rose.mse.jhu.edu>)

The reference to the Roman de la Rose medieval manuscript project leads me to highlight another type of new partnership that is especially appropriate to mention in this setting and that will increasingly be an integral part of our information strategy: international collaboration. Johns Hopkins now has formal agreements with three European university libraries, the first being with Oxford, which permitted its Roman de la Rose manuscript to be included in the project mentioned above. Similar agreements with Edinburgh, and, as of last week, Uppsala will be ever more important as faculty and students look to our libraries to aggregate and bring material to them electronically, and as certain funders view international partnerships as validation of the importance and feasibility of various projects.

New partnerships so pervade our world and our information strategies that I could also have described national efforts such as the Digital Library Federation (<http://www.diglib.org>), which has at last begun to achieve our original vision of an international partnership with the British Library’s recent decision to become a member; local efforts, such as the Hopkins-led project to make the collections of Baltimore’s libraries, museums and historical societies available on-line (<http://marylandartsoruce.org>); partnerships with Friends groups to broaden our support base and build our collections (<http://www.library.jhu.edu/friends>); and partnerships with

our state's academic libraries to build and operate on their behalf a regional print repository (<http://www.micua.org>)

But this litany of useful partnerships, all necessary elements of our strategic plan, prompts me to close on this cautionary note: We are not immune as a community from the human tendency to confuse means with ends; and we're also "nice." As more and more of our funders, both inside and outside our institutions, come to expect or even require partnerships as a condition of funding new initiatives, we need to be wary of "marriages of convenience" - the temptation to sign up, or sign on, as partners simply for expediency or as well-intended bows toward collegiality. Instead we need to be strategic, looking for collaborators who are complementary, who can fill in gaps in our expertise or collections or services. We need honestly to acknowledge, even relish, the fact that no one person or institution can do it all, and turn our energy to finding partners who can do, or who have, things we lack.

As we think beyond digital libraries, each of us must be open to new directions and partnerships. Those directions and partnerships are likely to be different, in response to our different missions and local conditions. But the destination toward which we move is surely the same: the provision of superior information services to the faculty and students we exist to serve.