

Eyes on the horizon, tackling the weeds: making organisational strategy into reality

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ABSTRACT

In 2008 following an extensive consultation process the University of Melbourne adopted “*Melbourne’s Scholarly Information Future: a ten-year strategy.*” Closely aligned with the University’s *Growing Esteem* agenda, the *Scholarly Information Future* strategy sets ambitious long-term goals for the creation, publication, management and preservation of library, archive and cultural collections; research records and research data; materials produced for learning and teaching purposes; and the University’s research outputs.

Since 2008 there have been many changes in the social, political, financial and business environment, as well as significant changes within the University of Melbourne. In this presentation we review progress towards the strategy’s implementation. We test the strategy’s ability to accommodate change, and we suggest how the University might anticipate the need for refining particular aspects of the strategy.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Universities adjust to their times, yet celebrate continuity. Since its inception in 1853 the University of Melbourne has undergone profound changes in its physical, intellectual and cultural landscapes. Yet core values remain unchanged, such as the belief that universities matter, and the understanding that a great university is founded on the strength and vigour of its scholarly community.

In 2008 following an extensive consultation process the University of Melbourne adopted “*Melbourne’s Scholarly Information Future: a ten-year strategy.*”[1] Closely aligned with the University’s *Growing Esteem* agenda,[2] the *Scholarly Information Future* strategy is designed to enhance the ability of Melbourne’s scholars to advance knowledge through creating, synthesising, contributing and accessing scholarly works. The University Librarian is responsible to the Provost and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) for the strategy’s implementation.

Two years later there have been many changes in the social, political, financial and business environment, as well as significant changes within the University of Melbourne. As O’Brien et al noted in 2009, “An environment of significant change is no excuse for inaction. Rather, it is a call to make strategic choices. The easy organisational response is to say we want it all – more print, more digital, more library and information professionals, large browsable collections and advanced digital information infrastructure. Yet at every university resources are limited and choices must be made. Avoiding those choices means we risk not maximising the value we can bring to our university’s mission, we risk continually trying to bridge the gap between our aspirations and our ability to deliver, we risk falling behind our competitors in attracting and retaining the best academics, the best students, the best professional staff.”[3]

Implementing *Melbourne’s Scholarly Information Future* strategy has required University Library leaders to maintain a double perspective – whilst keeping our eyes firmly on the long-term horizon, we must also join at ground level with Library staff and clients to clear away the weeds that impede our path. As Vice-Chancellor Glyn Davis has said, we must be firm on the ends and flexible on the means.

Based on the ten-year strategy, the Library developed a framework of documents for planning and reporting on progress. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Strategic planning – a framework of working documents

Document	Duration	Contents	Review cycle	Usage
Scholarly Information Strategy	10 years	Eight high-level aspirations (goals), 11 principles for guiding decisions	3 years	Key objectives rolled up into University strategic plan
Implementation plan	5 years	For each of eight strategic aspirations, a five-year implementation plan with annual targets	Annual	Lists operational targets for next five years, forms basis for annual plans
Annual plan	1 year	Summarises the year’s targets and progress towards them; lists individual managers responsible for delivery; identifies high-risk activities and risk mitigation tactics	6 months	Basis for local operational plans
Local operational plan	1 year	Optional. Developed by local workgroups, as needed. Adds detail to relevant sections of the annual plan	Quarterly	Basis for individual performance plans

Document	Duration	Contents	Review cycle	Usage
Performance development plan	1 year	Developed by individual staff members with their supervisors, outlines personal goals and training/development requirements. Shows how the individual contributes to achieving strategic goals.	Quarterly	Used to manage performance and development of individual staff members

Arising from the eight strategic aspirations, and articulated in each of these planning documents, the Library is focusing on developing its capabilities, introducing new and improved services, and developing infrastructure for scholarly communication.

Capital works such as a new off-site storage facility and the refurbishment of Library and teaching spaces obviously require investment from a variety of sources. If implemented, the Library's ambitious capital development plans will require new sources of funding or philanthropy.

The University Library has lobbied successfully in the last few years for increased spending on collection acquisitions, infrastructure and a small number of strategic initiatives. These are mostly one-off grants with no expectation of recurrent funding to sustain the new facilities or services. Most of the *Scholarly Information Future* implementation thus far has been achieved within the existing funding envelope – which does not necessarily grow from year to year. Therefore the Library is investing staff time in process improvement, improved reporting of service delivery metrics (to aid decision-making) and new research into client needs and expectations. If successful, these activities will enable the Library to meet any new cost-containment requirements in 2012 whilst allowing the University to leap, rather than walk, into the future of scholarly communication.

Process improvement, service management and client research are all aspects of capability development. These are supplemented by a targeted professional development program for Library staff, be they librarians, library technicians, digital media specialists, audio-visual technicians, information management consultants, curriculum developers, IT specialists, designers of learning spaces, accessibility advisers, project managers or administrative officers. Staff are encouraged to participate in projects that teach them new skills or expose them to new ways of thinking and working. Formal TAFE training, leading to a Certificate IV qualification, has been provided along with internal opportunities such as behind-the-scenes tours of Library operations and staff seminars on specialist topics. A staff exchange with Griffith University in 2010 was particularly successful, as is the Library Cadet Scheme now in its third year.

Essential to the success of any strategic initiative is engagement with a community of stakeholders. If the Library truly is 'the heart of the University' then it should expect – and receive – support from across the academic community. We must move beyond marketing messages and PR 'happy talk.' Stakeholders expect a more meaningful level of engagement and including students, academics and University staff in decision-making processes is one way to facilitate this.

Like all other Australian university libraries, the University of Melbourne Library collects and reports on a range of performance metrics. While process and output measures for service delivery are reasonably well understood, our service delivery managers now need to develop a set of 'leading' metrics that will help them to identify services that may require redesign or retirement. Client and stakeholder feedback can be an early indicator that a change of direction may be needed. As well, the Library is working on ways of conducting periodic environment scans to identify new ideas and trends in the broader academic milieu.

A University management review in mid-2010 concluded that the *Scholarly Information Future* strategy is robust and its implementation is on track. This is confirmed by results of the biennial Library Client Satisfaction Survey, where the University's performance has significantly improved in four of five nationally benchmarked 'best practice' categories.

The 11 principles listed in the strategy document are designed to guide decisions in the future. The principles focus on long-term 'deep' values that are expected to hold true regardless of external changes in business, education, policy or other spheres.[4] For example, humans will tend to prefer technologies that are easy to use; organisations will tend to prefer investments that deliver good value; and, for certain kinds of research, physical library collections will never be surpassed by digital replicas.

In this paper we have provided examples of both 'horizon' and 'down in the weeds' activities that embed the implementation of *Melbourne's Scholarly Information Future* strategy into everyday practices in the University Library. The relationship between our long-term aspirations and day-to-day operations is described in a series of related planning documents that set clear targets and are reviewed regularly for progress and relevance.

REFERENCES

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4. The process of developing the 11 principles was explored in Mark Brodksy and Margaret L Ruwoldt, “Shaping a scholarly information strategy for higher education institutions,” pre-conference workshop at Educause Australasia 2009, <http://www.caudit.edu.au/educauseaustralasia09/program/workshops.php - a07>

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

A qualified archivist and records manager, Donna McRostie is Director of Information Management, one of four organisational portfolios in the University of Melbourne Library. The Information Management program has a University-wide brief to support improvements in all aspects of information management, to develop new lines of business for the University Library such as the fledgling University Digitisation Service, and to contribute to the professional development of non-academic staff across the University.

Margaret L Ruwoldt was a project officer in the Information Futures Commission that developed “Melbourne’s Scholarly Information Fututre: a ten-year strategy”. Over the last 20 years she has held a broad range of professional roles in two Victorian universities. She currently leads a small information management team in the University Library at the University of Melbourne.

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