On the edge of invisibility: Can academic libraries design a new wardrobe for the emperor?

Dr Gillian Hallam
Adjunct Professor
Science & Engineering Faculty
QUT

QUT

Overview

- The problem of the 'invisible' academic library
- The library's current context
  - The digital world
  - Quality assurance and impact assessment
- Opportunities for new library services
  - Learning and teaching
  - Research
  - Information and knowledge management
- The essential steps in the process to design a new wardrobe fit for the future

The problem

- The fairytale analogy: the emperor's invisible clothes Librarians have made the technology work too well
  - They have hidden the complexities   (Law, 2012)
- Library activities and services have become 'invisible'
  - Seamless information provision
  - Disintermediation: librarian-supported bibliographic searches have become obsolete
  - Weak links in researchers' minds between the digital content they use and the library's role in providing it
- Libraries have become more intangible for their clients
- The skills and competencies of LIS professionals have also become 'invisible'

Seamless services

- Integrated library systems
- One-stop resource discovery and delivery
- Federated searching
- Open URLs and link resolvers
- Recommender services
- Open cloud-based architectures

The digital world

- The speed of change
  - Rapidly shifting user behaviours
- The conundrum of users:
  - Being time poor, but information rich, as opposed to being time rich, but information poor
- Instant gratification
  - I want it all and I want it now!
- Immense growth in mobile, multi-purpose devices
- Personal customisation of content
- Fragmentation of resources
- Globalisation of communication and collaboration
- Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 developments

Increasing focus of quality and impact in higher education

- It has always been difficult for libraries to prove their 'worth'
- Traditional performance measurements tend to look at library efficiencies and client satisfaction
- However, the closer the library moves to the core business of the university, the less relevant these measurements become
- Some newer evaluation approaches for academic libraries:
    - Quality assurance audits eg TEQSA
    - National awards recognising excellence in learning and teaching
    - Learner analytics
    - Libraries changing peoples' lives
        - The contribution that libraries make to academic performance
        - The correlation between the use of electronic library resources and academic achievement

(ACRL, 2010; Goodall & Pattern, 2011; Stone et al, 2011; Cox & Jantti, 2012; Markeless & Streatfield, 2012)

The role of the academic library today?

- To what extent do library services contribute to changing the lives of:
  - Students?
  - Teaching staff?
  - Researchers?
  - Academic managers?
  - Library staff?
- And what could they do differently, to make more of a difference?

Opportunities for a new wardrobe

The Sun King

Image: www.imagekind.com

Opportunities for new services

- Where can the library make a difference?
- What contribution can the library make?
- What is feasible?   What is achievable?
- The answers to these questions will be unique to every academic library – and will depend on the mission of the university

Designing for impact

1. What is the focus – where can the library make a difference within the university?
2. What is the objective of the new service?
   – Why are you doing it?
3. What are the relevant impact indicators?
   – How will you know if the objectives are met – ie that the library really does make a difference?
4. Collect the evidence to measure the extent to which the service is having the anticipated (or unanticipated) impact:
   – Have attitudes and perceptions changed?
   – Do people do things differently?
   – Have people gained new knowledge and skills?

(Markless & Streatfield, 2012)

Opportunities for the library's new wardrobe

- e-learning and m-learning
- Open Educational Resources (OER)
- MOOCs
- Learning support
- Scholarly communication: open access
- Research data management
- Information governance
- Knowledge management
- Brand awareness and marketing
- The institution's strategic priorities

'Good practice exists in pockets'

- Some academic libraries are already involved in some these activities
- Many do have some individual pieces of clothing…
- But it is critical that they:
  - Continue to build the wardrobe of outfits
  - Engage in impact assessment to understand why they have introduced new services and to measure the extent to which they are making a real difference

e-learning & m-learning

- A fertile area for academic libraries to:
  - Aggregate born-digital and digitised resources from a variety of trusted and authoritative sources
  - Manage content links and licensing
  - Embed the learning of information skills into multimedia settings
  - Mediate and support group dialogue
  - Harness the academic communities' creativity within the e-learning and m-learning space
  - Gerry McKiernan, Iowa State University http://mobile-libraries.blogspot.com.au/

Open Educational Resources

- The objectives of content-focused OER projects are strongly related to library activities and to the skills of LIS professionals

- JISC OER Program
  - JISC, CETIS, HEA

- Study of OER initiatives in the UK:
  - Most are based in the library
  - 75% involve library staff
  - 50% have the library as the lead partner

LIS expertise in OER initiatives

- Information organisation
  - Metadata standards, vocabularies, indexing and classification
- Information retrieval
  - Resource discovery
  - Working with vendors, publishers and academics to introduce federated searching of OER repositories
  - Search engine optimisation
- Information literacy
  - Including digital media literacies
- Information management
  - Repository technologies and management
  - IP rights management and licensing
- Librarians developing their own OER repositories
- http://open-resources-librarian.blogspot.com.au/

MOOCs

- Resource discovery and access
- Licensing
- Copyright
- Open access
- Information and media literacies

- Very early days:

  "It's important for libraries to be engaged in the conversation and present and watching... This is a great time for experimentation."

  (Merrilee Proffitt, cited in Howard, 2013)

- http://moocsandlibraries.blogspot.com.au

Learning support

- Information & media literacies
  - Building fluency with data, visual, spatial, media and ICT literacies
- Academic literacy
  - Study and academic writing skills
- Development of quality support resources for students
  - Collaboration with others to coordinate and connect disparate services across the institution
- Provide flexibility with both F2F and independent learning programs
- Exploration and innovation using social networking tools
- For all students – not just those 'at risk'

Open access

- Alternative forms of scholarly research
- International and national policy directions
- Open access repositories
- Resource discovery
- Metadata management and preservation
- Digital rights management
- Digitisation of unique collections
- Advocacy

Research data management

- The storage, curation, preservation and provision of access to digital research data
- Increasing volume of data generated by researchers
- Funding bodies demands for access to research data
- Increasing use of eResearch tools
- Increasing ability to share and re-use research data
- Interest in re-analysing data with new research themes and cross-disciplinary studies

Research support

- Academic literacies
  - Information and digital literacies
  - Scholarly communication: citation and referencing
  - Digital rights management, copyright
  - Academic dishonesty
- Research and impact measurement
  - Research excellence: ERA
  - Researcher profiles
  - Bibliometric analysis
- Supporting research communities of practice
- Connection with relevant people
  - IT services
  - Research funding and activities
  - Research governance

Information governance

- University-wide information management principles and protocols
- Information repositories
- Archiving and preservation
- Compliance with legal data retention and disclosure responsibilities
- Copyright and intellectual property

Knowledge management

- The connection between academia and knowledge creation makes universities 'obvious sites' for KM activities

  (Metcalf, 2006)

- Academic libraries are in a strong position:
  - To strategically manage the broader institutional knowledge assets
    - Knowledge repositories
    - Digitisation projects
    - Collaboration tools (internal and external)
    - Knowledge transfer
  - To form alliances to contribute to the wider knowledge economy

  (Hayes & Kent, 2010)

Brand awareness and marketing

- Contributing to the institution's marketing efforts
  - Partnerships with feeder schools and colleges
  - Associate memberships of the library
  - Collaborations with departments for school visits and summer schools
  - Customer relationship management
  - Partnerships with alumni office

Finding the fit with the institution's strategic priorities

- Widened participation
- Student retention
- First year experience
- International bridging programs
- Research excellence
- Quality assurance
- ....

The
emperor's
new
wardrobe

Designing a wardrobe with impact

- How can the academic library make a real, inspiring impact on the teaching and learning process?
- How can the academic library become an integral partner with faculty involved in the business of research?
- How can the academic library stimulate knowledge production and sharing across the institution?
- How can the academic library stake its claim in other parts of the scholarly enterprise?

"There are no easy, black-and-white answers"
(McKnight, 2010)

"There are no quick fixes or immediate answers"
(Carnaby, 2010)

"Libraries are in unchartered territory"
(Stoffle & Cuillier, 2011)

The way forward…

1. Break down the walls
2. Establish new partnerships
3. Develop the right skills and attitudes
4. Always aim to add value
5. Evaluate the impact

1. Break down the walls

- Discussions about the future of the academic library must include the wider academic community
- Academic librarians must become influencers across institutional boundaries:
  - Get out of the library
  - Broaden their remit
  - Become change agents

2. Establish new partnerships

"It is the rare library that exists in a vacuum: most are part of a system… which requires interaction and cooperative activity. In order to best serve those who need them, libraries must cooperate widely with entities other than themselves"

(Poulson & Horrocks, 2012)

- Academic librarians must actively engage with:
  - Academic administrators
  - Policy managers
  - IT experts
  - Teaching staff
  - eLearning designers
  - Student support agencies
  - Researchers and research management
  - Marketing and communications

3. Develop the right skills & attitudes

- Fewer generic skills, but more specialised capabilities
- Focus on the depth and breadth of technical expertise
- Willingness to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity
- Desire to imagine, design, create and innovate
- Commitment to continuous improvement
- An intrepid sense of adventure
- The political acumen to develop and maintain effective partnerships and alliances
- Excellent communication and marketing skills

- Guided and supported by transformational leadership

Skills and attitudes

- Staff will need expert knowledge and skills in:
  - e-learning and online pedagogies
  - OER technologies and standards
  - Digitisation
  - Information and knowledge management
  - Research data infrastructure
- This can be achieved through:
  - Capacity building
    - Recruitment, development and/or partnerships
  - Workplace learning
    - Job design, project activities, critical reflection
    - Encouraging and supporting new areas of expertise
  - Working with educators to develop fresh, relevant, dynamic and modular LIS curricula

4. Always aim to add value

- Work with staff to develop a fresh vision and create a new profile
- Forge innovative pathways through the myriad of resources, communication technologies and support services in order to:
  - Add value to the users
  - Add value to the content
  - Add value to the staff
  - Add value to the institution

(McKnight, 2010, p.203; Law, 2012)

5. Evaluate the impact

- Plan for impact assessment as new services are designed and developed
- Gather the relevant evidence to measure the impact
- Communicate the results: let key stakeholders know how the library is making a difference to the academic community, including:
  - Students
  - Teaching staff
  - Researchers
  - Academic managers
  - Institutional strategy

Conclusion

- On many levels, academic librarians are already active partners in the ever-evolving academic world, as participants, collaborators and facilitators

- This gives them a firm foundation to counter the threat of invisibility by:
  - Developing a new identity
  - Building productive stakeholder relationships to support policy and practice across the university
  - Creating a wider portfolio of services that can make a real difference to all stakeholders
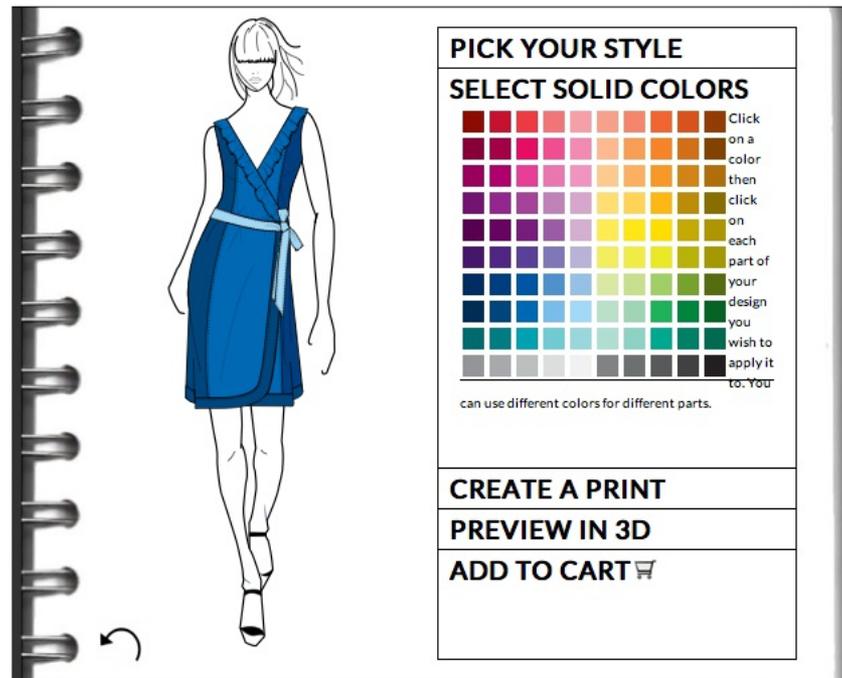
Academic libraries can certainly design their own new wardrobe -

So maybe you should book your seats for the academic library fashion parade at the next THETA Conference!

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