

The Academic Librarians: New Roles and Challenges: a Comparison with Kurt De Belder's "Partners in Knowledge"

Director Anne-Berit Gregersen
Learning Center & Library
Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences,
PO Box 4 St. Olav's plass 0130, Oslo, Norway
E-mail: anne-berit.gregersen@hioa.no

Abstract: For many years libraries have adapted to digital change as this has been expressed on the immediate and tangible levels - books, journals, search & retrieval etc. But they have done so within established institutional and conceptual borders. A wider set of technological, economic and socio-cultural changes are now impacting universities at the framework level. This has consequences for all agents and subunits within the mother institution. In this new situation the academic librarians need to reassess not only their functions and modus operandi, but also their ethos and professional identity. With reference to general traits as exposed by de Belder this paper traces such core challenges facing a library at an institution of higher learning in transition and suggest practical solutions.

The Norwegian Academic Libraries

Today several university colleges are aiming to be recognized as universities. This leads to a stronger emphasis on academic skills for both students and faculty. The students are required to improve their academic writing and information literacy skills. The faculty members are expected to increase the publication rate in peer reviewed scientific journals, preferably with open access. They are also challenged by the new ways of publishing on the web, using e-books and print on demand. The new paradigms that arise from e-learning and MOOCs («Massive Open Online Courses») might lead to new ways of organizing most activities in higher education including librarianship. This, and the technological change towards mobile technology and "bring your own device" ("BYOD") lead to a new ecology with easy and more frequent access to resources outside the institutions. These challenges must be met by university libraries offering highly specialized services in a rapidly changing environment.

The librarians work tasks are thus changing with technological developments over the last 50 years. ICT has long been a central part of the librarians' field of activity and we are generally considered by others to be competent users. Many librarians work as Web-developers and we consider the web to be an important arena for organizing information. Now we have to face MOOCs and ask ourselves what impact this will have on the libraries.

The librarians are also faced with the academization of the university college. From building collections, giving access to information and providing reference services we are now giving support to learning and research. More effort is put in the task of making our students competent in information literacy – to make them able to update their professional knowledge throughout their working life.

Langley, Gray and Vaughan (2003) lists these main challenges for libraries:

- Changes in the production and dissemination of scholarly communication
- Changes in higher education
- Growth of technology inside and outside of the library:
- New means of communicating with library patrons and colleagues
- Materials in multiple formats, and read with varying systems, including mobile technology
- Competition from the "free web" and from commercial vendors and booksellers
- Technology in the workplace

”To meet the challenges of this electronic environment, you must be willing to acquire new skills and provide new services. You must become proficient in electronic collections management and further your commitment to public service. If you don’t, your users will change without you.” (Langley, Gray, & Vaughan, 2003, p. 86)

”The dynamic environment of the library and information sector dictates the need for library and information professionals to remain flexible and adaptable to change...Lifelong learning extends and develops the knowledge, skills and competencies of practitioners. It also enables them to prepare for their work more effectively, to broaden their careers and to undertake new tasks” (Fisher, Hallam, & Partridge, 2005, p. 49)

How do libraries deal with these challenges? According to Kurt De Belder (2013) libraries do change:

“Libraries have changed tremendously, have innovated, have added digital services, have generated more research/teaching time at the faculty level. But to a great extent have not ended services and have kept within the existing library paradigm. Major drives for decisions about libraries within university administration is budgetary considerations. Change is outpacing us.”

Librarianship in Norway

How does this apply for my library organization? The simple answer is: We change all the time, but are still doing many of the traditional library tasks.

The Norwegian research assessment system has created an arena for the librarians. The need for current research information covering the entire scholarly publication production has led to the development of a shared and general repository, - the Current Research Information System (CRISTin) that is used by most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and research institutes in the country. This has created new opportunities for the librarians to work in closer connections with the researchers and faculty. Support is given on a variety of issues. Examples are choosing academic journals suitable for their publication, the many pitfalls of publishing for Open Access and questions regarding publishing rights. The library in my own institution is also in charge of managing the fees for open access publishing. Not only the finished academic product but also the curation of research data is a related task waiting to be taken care of. We also serves as a publishing house for the institutional report series, with one of the university librarians as editor for the series.

We provide a range of embedded courses in information literacy for students, curriculum development support, EndNote, academic writing skills and general support to the students’ learning demands. The libraries are being shaped to meet the needs of the users, rather than the internals of collections’ maintenance. “Customer relationship” and “the user in focus” calls for a new type of librarian, with new skills and new priorities. We are engaging library staff with experience in teaching, customer relationship as well as technical librarians with programming skills. Increased focus on research and doctorate programs requires close collaboration with the teaching staff and research communities.

Norwegian nursing students, as an example, should be able to evaluate research in order to decide upon best practices in nursing. We have developed cooperation between nursing teachers and librarians in the training of students in evidence based nursing. The students meet the librarians in the classroom rather than behind the circulation desks. We have recently developed a new service whereby all students are invited into the library to receive counseling on their writing skills by trained language teachers.

Local relevance

De Belder has listed the main challenges that arise to traditional functions in an academic library. I use them to illustrate current changes at my own institution. The list covers Selection/Acquisition, Cataloging,

Archiving, Reference desk work, Outreach, Making material available, the “find-it” business, Special Collections and Technology management. The following are comments on how each of these items are handled or planned for in my own library.

Selection/acquisition is mostly done by librarians. We are currently testing a new type of collection development, Patron Driven Acquisition for e-books. This model implies that students, free of charge, may look at and download a new book title of their own choice from a broad collection of titles chosen by the library. The loan is valid for a period of 3 days, but can be renewed. We have set up a model where we loan the book twice before we actually purchase it. For each loan the library will pay a fee of 15% of the cost of the book. Each title can be used for 326 days a year. This model makes it possible for multiple students to use the same book at the same time. At the end of the year 325 new days will be activated on the title. Already 3 months into the fiscal year we have spent a substantial part of the budget allocated for PDA, and we were forced change the settings. In hindsight we probably should have imported a smaller collection into our library catalogue. We need more experience on the use of PDA in order to have control over limited resources, and ask ourselves whether this is a road to follow.

Cataloging: The national academic library system, Bibsys, is both a joint catalog and a common ILL system for all the Norwegian academic libraries. This means saving time spent not only on cataloguing, but also in the acquisition process as well as for interlibrary loans. We reuse about 80% of the entries in the catalogue, but we still prepare the books for the shelves, with shelf tags and RFID etc.

Archiving: The OA and institutional repositories has created new field of work in libraries. This is a growth sector within Norwegian academic libraries and has taken over much of the work load previously spent on cataloguing and classification. Local archiving of materials in repositories also means a lot of work on management of copyrights towards both authors and publishers. In addition to the open archive we have established a closed archive for publications not permitted for OA. Data collections are in the early stage in Norway, but are a task that will need attention. If not the library is taking on the curation of research data, who will? This is parallel to the OA movement. The librarians are willing to engage in their institution’s need for knowledge curation. We are hoping for a unified effort with Bibsys to build a national system for research data.

Reference desk: Staffed with highly qualified staff, this is one of our main priorities and an important meeting point with the users. We also have special “drop in” reference point for students needing guidance in information seeking, and a “drop in” point for guidance in academic writing and Norwegian as a second language. Our “book a librarian” service is widely used by graduate students and researchers. This service requires booking in advance in order to match the needs of the users with our subject librarians. Virtual reference desk is in early beginning and the service must be further developed in order to meet the needs of education and research.

Outreach: There are faculty liaisons with typical library services, but also partners in research and teaching. In 2012 we had 800 hours of teaching in faculty with different levels of information literacy, reference management systems, tailored services to research and publishing support. The library is responsible for the quality control of students’ reading lists with regard to new editions, reference styles etc. before they are published on the web. In addition to support in writing skill and study technique we have English for Academic Purposes, specially aimed at PhD students and researchers. EAP is staffed with highly qualified staff fluently in English and holding a PhD degree. We have a research staff of 6 people within the library organization. They cover Research, 3 within e-learning and 3 within language and communication. In addition we handle Copyright questions related to OA, e-publishing (repositories and OJS) and Administration of a OA publishing fund where authors can apply for funding when publishing in OA journals with a publishing fee. Our University librarians are liaisons to PhD candidates. This is a librarian with minimum a master degree within the actual field of study and serves as a subject specialist. These positions are new in our learning center and library and a valuable addition to the traditional library staff. One of our university librarians is the editor of the university college publishing series.

Making available: We still have growth in lending of printed materials, but a greater growth in use of e-publications. E-books needs to be retrieved the same way as printed books. We can make use of publisher’s metadata, but need to add Norwegian terms as well. A lot of work goes into the institutional repositories. Has this

work taken over for the traditional cataloguing and classification? Our open repository is connected to major search engines like Google Scholar. Making available can also be about facilitating access to curriculum on Ipads and making apps and web-pages for smartphones. We also give access to all our e-material and databases both on and outside campus.

“Find it” business: A big part of our job! But increased use of e-resources turns us in to the “get it” business. This service is closely connected to teaching, making staff and students aware of the library’s resources to become competent users of databases and library systems. “Googlification” of the library systems makes information retrieval easier for the end user, but the understanding of academic publications is scarce among fresh students. Hence the importance of information literacy courses in the library.

Special collections: This is not a big issue in my library organization, but we do have a certain obligation to take care of the history of many small professions. Use of National Library is a possibility for deposit and digitalization of special collections.

Technology management: Bibsys, The National Library system means little local management. More systems must be shared in the future, like the accounting systems and acquisition systems used by the mother institution. We have a great advantage in a common library system within higher education in Norway. State institutions like most higher educational institutions, use the same administrative systems, the same purchasing systems etc which opens up for cooperation among institutions and between systems. Our new library system should make use of system integration on a wider scale. Other fields of technology management are institutional repositories. Bibsys has developed and is hosting the repositories for a group of minor educational institutions. The major institutions runs their own repositories – nearly all based on Dspace. In addition, NORA, the Norwegian Open Research Archive, is harvesting the local repositories. The library is responsible for managing an Open Journal System to accommodate the institutions own scholarly open access journals. We also have the management of library web-services within the institutional frames. The library’s web-pages is much about making available – collections and databases, but also user support. In the future we will have a stronger emphasis on the development of web-based services like online tutorials – We have some very good Norwegian open source tutorials on information literacy and library support to PhD candidates. In addition we are making short online tutorials locally available on YouTube, streaming of faculty lectures and management of e-learning content.

Our web-services are partly available also on smartphones and tablets. Some years ago we thought that students would bring their own laptops prior to use the library computers. Now we see a growing demand for access to the library computers, which can accommodate the students with a variety of updated programs and easy printing facilities. So the emphasis on “Bring your own device” (BYOD) might be slightly overrated as our students value functionality. All the same we have to keep up with technological change

This overview clearly shows that there is a growth in the field of technology management, and the support and partnership in research and teaching. To become adequate partners in research and teaching within a university the librarians must also be skilled academics. They must be able to understand the needs of the researcher and the demands for academic information literacy faced by the students on different levels.

Lorcan Dempsey (2013) writes about three challenges for libraries: engagement, rightscaling infrastructure, and institutional innovation. The shift is in the engagement which is creating new services to research and education. Kurt de Belder is speaking about “Partners in research”. Dempsey explains it as a shift in engagement. There is a clear shift in creating new services to research and education, but are we able to stop doing other tasks?

In an interview Carol Kuhlthau says: ”So that’s where I see the librarianship as being in a time of change. The librarian is moving from something very structured to something that’s much less structured, working with ideas and concepts, pulling in resources and working with the person who is going through various different stages of a problem. But I don’t think we’re quite there yet. It is a hugely changing profession.” (Tonning, 2009, p. 52)

Future thinking

An abundance of online learning resources, coupled with the rise of Open Access also stand to affect the nature and services provided by libraries. We know very little of the impact of MOOCs in Norwegian academic libraries. If these courses continue to be massive and open the whole way of dealing with access to journals and databases will have to change. Today the Open Access movement cannot meet the competition of the commercial information vendors – will the MOOCs change that and make the education sector a learning space for all? Or will the institutions limit their best courses to those who can pay? The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), trend report claims that online education will democratize and disrupt global learning. The term disrupts meaning innovations that improve a product or service in ways that the market does not expect. This trend report is pointing to five trends, which all will impact library services. Trend no 1 is “New technologies will both expand and limit who has access to information”. This puts emphasis on the importance of information literacy skills as tools for distinguishing authoritative information and the question of ownership of information and content. Learning will focus more on how to authenticate and exploit information rather than memorize knowledge. E-learning will also disrupt global learning by changing the ways of individual learning and the organization of learning institutions.

E-learning and online courses will make a big change in use of library resources. Today the big MOOC's will not get you a university degree, but are used as additional courses to your own study program. MOOCs do in very little degree include reading lists. The universities own e-learning programs will have to include literature – electronic and enriched. This will take us from making reading lists and bibliographies to providing content to learning platforms and enriched textbooks created by the teaching staff in collaboration with the librarians. Textbooks for elementary and further education offers enriched text, and we will see the same development in higher education. The authors of textbooks for higher education students are teachers and researchers in universities. Librarians have a trusted cooperation with these authors within their institutions. Taking part in developing content for enriched textbooks will become a natural development for librarians.

Libraries do change. Our skills and services are being used in new ways and on other work tasks. Instead of meeting the users behind the circulation desk, we meet the students and researchers in their classrooms or offices, teaching information literacy or giving support to reference management. This will need a more academic, but also a more active approach to our roles as librarians. We still perform cataloguing, but towards institutional repositories rather than the traditional library catalogue. We will have to master management of e-contents and publication rights. We are being partners in publishing research and in data curation. We have to master the changes in technology and make our services accessible on multiple devices from anywhere in the world. Will the academic library still be important on campus when the students are everywhere else? Will the libraries become facilitators of learning and research, providing networks and meeting places where access to information is the core activity? Or will the librarians be taken over by robots and search engines? Librarians are able to change – both their own practice and the academic library institution.

References:

- De Belder, Kurt. (2013). *Transformation of the Academic Library*. Paper presented at the Bibsys brukermøte, Trondheim.
http://www.bibsys.no/norsk/bibliotekar/brukermoter/brukermote_2013/Presentasjoner/index.php
- Dempsey, Lorcan. (2013). Three challenges: engaging, rightscaling and innovating. Retrieved from
<http://orweblog.oclc.org/index.html>
- Fisher, Bidy, Hallam, Gillian, & Partridge, Helen. (2005). Different approaches - common conclusions: the skills debate of the 21st century. In P. Genoni & G. Walton (Eds.), *Continuing professional development: preparing for new roles in libraries : a voyage of discovery : Sixth World Conference on Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning for the Library and Information Professions* (Vol. 116, pp. 41-52). München: Saur.
- Langley, Anne, Gray, Edward, & Vaughan, K. T. L. (2003). *The role of the academic librarian*. Oxford: Chandos Publ.

Tønning, Anne Sissel Vedvik. (2009). Carol C. Kuhlthau - interviews at the Conference Learning, Innovation and the Use of Information in Aalborg, Denmark, April 2008. *Nordic Journal of Information Literacy in Higher Education*, 1(1), 52-53.