Positioning libraries to support the goals of higher education institutions: The Peabody Academic Library Leadership Institute

Sharon A. Weiner  
*Purdue University, sweiner@purdue.edu*

Patricia Senn Breivik  
*Nehemiah Communications, patricia@nehemiahcommunications.com*

Timothy Caboni  
*Vanderbilt University*

Dennis Clark  
*Texas A & M University - College Station*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs](http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs)  
Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs)

Recommended Citation  
Weiner, Sharon A.; Breivik, Patricia Senn; Caboni, Timothy; and Clark, Dennis, "Positioning libraries to support the goals of higher education institutions: The Peabody Academic Library Leadership Institute" (2009). *Libraries Faculty and Staff Scholarship and Research*. Paper 72.  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0193082090339691](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0193082090339691)

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Understanding the Higher Education Context:
The Peabody Academic Library Leadership Institute

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the genesis of Vanderbilt University’s Peabody Academic Library Leadership Institute as an outcome of a particular philosophy. That philosophy is based on the concept that to fulfill their potential contributions, academic libraries need to direct their planning, resources, and services to support the priorities of their parent institutions.

This article addresses the need for campus-focused-leadership training; higher education leadership training for academic librarians; and the higher education context for libraries. It describes why Vanderbilt’s Peabody College of Education and Human Development initiated a professional development institute for librarians. It describes the Institute’s history, curriculum, and assessment and explores future directions.

INTRODUCTION AND PHILOSOPHY

This paper describes the genesis of Vanderbilt University's Peabody Academic Library Leadership (ALL) Institute. The Institute is one of a roster of Peabody Professional Institutes (PPI) that originated in 2006. These institutes have a commitment to grounding the curricula in education research and theory. The philosophy of ALL is that effective library administrators internalize the higher education context in which academic libraries exist so they can best position their libraries in support of campus priorities. Becoming more visible in achieving campus priorities, in turn, better positions
libraries to obtain limited resources. The philosophy also includes librarians’ envisioning themselves as campus change agents.

However, just understanding these philosophical issues was not deemed sufficient for the purposes of the Institute. From the beginning, the intent was for transformative learning to occur. British Columbia Professor Emeritus Angus Gunn defines transformative learning as follows. “In today’s schools of education transformative learning is defined for us as experiencing a deep, structural shift in thought, feelings, and actions, one that alters our understanding of ourselves as well as our relationships with other humans and with our social and natural world” (Gunn, 2008). That is what was hoped for: to have participants’ lives changed!

The paper will describe the reasons for the broader higher education focus. It will explain the evolution of the Institute and will provide context through an examination of the higher education and library literature. It will discuss the curriculum and learning strategies; funding; assessment; and consider future directions.

FOCUS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Until recently, the existence of academic libraries in institutions of higher education was unquestioned. Now the questioning is not only about the role of, but even the necessity for academic libraries. This is due to the vast amounts of information that are now available on the Web and the budget issues that have prompted difficult decision-making about priorities (Cochrane, 2007); (Carlson, 2001); (Carlson, 2002); (Hardesty, 2000). Leaders foresaw that libraries needed to transform themselves (Brewer, 2004); (Lewis, 2007). Many academic libraries have taken on new roles
(Dewey, 2004); (P. Johnson, 1996). There is evidence that they do contribute to the reputation of their institutions (Weiner, 2009). They can have important roles in supporting institutional efforts related to student and faculty recruitment and retention; fundraising; grants; scholarly communication, and community engagement (Breivik, 2006). This is the rationale for the focus of the Institute: to instill an understanding of the higher education context in which libraries exist, and for attendees to develop strategies for positioning their libraries to better support institutional goals.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Leadership training for academic librarians is a recognized need across the profession. The American Library Association has a website devoted to different leadership training opportunities (American Library Association). The Council for Library and Information Resources (CLIR) held a symposium in 2006 on the status of mid-career leadership training. That meeting identified current themes and “unmet needs, such as leadership or management training for early-career librarians” (Council on Library and Information Resources). Although there are a number of leadership programs within the library profession as well as in higher education, there are few which operate at the nexus of the two.

The oldest, the UCLA Senior Fellows Program, is a bi-annual event which offers no more than 15 senior academic library leaders a “unique combination of management perspectives, strategic thinking, and practical and theoretical approaches to the issues confronting academic institutions and their libraries” for three weeks (Senior Fellows at UCLA). The week-long ACRL/Harvard Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians
was founded in 1999. Convening annually, 90-100 participants develop skills in effective leadership, transformational learning, planning and organizational strategy and change (The Leadership Institute for Academic Librarians). The Frye Institute, founded by CLIR and Emory University, seeks to develop “the next generation of higher education leaders emerging from IT and library backgrounds” (Frye Institute). The Association of Research Libraries Research Library Leadership Fellows Program involves a comprehensive, two-year commitment of “staff who have the desire and potential for leadership at ARL libraries to themes and institutions that will enhance their preparedness” (Association of Research Libraries).

Each of these programs is unique and examines leadership from different perspectives. Though these programs have received glowing reviews from participants in library publications, there have been few, if any, assessments of how well these institutes have met their goals. A recent edition of a business library journal had positive reviews about the ACRL/Harvard Institute (Kalin 2008) and the UCLA Senior Fellows program (Rumble and MacEwan 2008). Although neither article assesses the outcomes of their respective programs in terms of impact on participants’ work and careers, they do provide significant insight into the curriculum, experiences, and intention. Kalin credits the excellent teaching, stable faculty, and case-study method as positive characteristics of the ACRL/Harvard program. The UCLA Senior Fellows indicated that a major advantage of their program is working and networking with a cohort of like-minded librarians during and after the three-week institute.

BACKGROUND OF INSTITUTE AT PEABODY COLLEGE
There are several reasons why Vanderbilt's Peabody College of Education and Human Development developed an academic library leadership institute. These reasons relate to the timing of the development of key relationships and to priorities established for the College.

In 2005, the Dean of Peabody College of Education and Human Development, Camilla Benbow, identified the offering of professional development training as a priority for the College. Peabody College was renowned for its summer professional development programs in its early history, but had not provided such training in more recent decades. The Dean appointed then Assistant Dean, Timothy Caboni, to organize the programs. He established the “Peabody Professional Institutes” and solicited ideas for topics. The Director of the Peabody Library, Sharon Weiner, was aware that there was a need for leadership training for academic librarians. Although other training programs existed, they were not meeting all of the existing needs. Also, there were over 2,000 alumni of the Peabody Library Science Department, which closed in 1989. Many alumni were disappointed that Vanderbilt no longer had a library school. If one of the professional development institutes related to librarianship, it would show that Peabody College continued to support library education. Weiner proposed an institute on academic library leadership to Caboni and he accepted the idea.

At the same time, San Jose State Library Dean, Patricia Breivik was writing a book with Vanderbilt Chancellor, Gordon Gee. She asked Weiner to submit a case study about the Peabody Library transformation for possible inclusion in their book. The transformation was an example of how strategically and visibly supporting the goals of the larger institution can take a library that no one wanted and transform it into what the
dean called “their crown jewel.” When Caboni accepted Weiner's idea for a leadership institute for academic librarians, Weiner asked Breivik to co-chair the institute and develop the curriculum with her.

**INSTITUTE CURRICULUM**

The Institute is designed not only to impart information, but to change participants’ perspectives and mental models. The change is from one of a library-centric leader to one that is institution-centric. This is accomplished in two ways.

First, the institution-centric perspective is modeled by having all the keynote speakers come from academic leadership positions outside of libraries (i.e., a senior university president, the executive director of a regional accrediting agency, an academic dean and campus leader, a development officer, and a human resources officer). In addition, librarians interact with other campus personnel on panels designed to explore practical library applications of keynote addresses.

Second, the curriculum is a carefully constructed series of learning experiences. It uses a variety of learning methods to accommodate individual learning preferences and to reinforce important themes. These include lecture/presentation; panel discussions; small group discussions; individual reflection; informal discussions among participants and Institute faculty; readings; and development of a project. A unifying factor for each of the participants’ involvement is their self-identified projects.

The experiences of most of the people who attend the Institute are aligned with Mezirow’s research on the stages of “perspective transformation” (Mezirow, p. 168) in adults. The stages that are planned in the Institute or observed in participants are:
• A disorienting dilemma
• Exploring possible new roles, relationships, and actions
• Planning a course of action
• Acquiring the knowledge to implement a plan
• Increase in competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
• Personal integration of the new perspective (Mezirow, p. 168-9)

The strategy for learning is compatible with the constructivist approach to pedagogy, that is, “the educator’s role in the student’s learning process is to create a learning situation and coach students along the way...Present learning experiences are assimilated into past mental structures and, by the same token, mental structures gradually change to accommodate the new experience” (Torras and Saetre, 2009).

The Institute begins on a Sunday evening and concludes after lunch on Thursday. The Fellows participate in scheduled learning and networking activities from breakfast through dinner each day except for one evening that is unscheduled. (Meal times provide opportunities for participants to interact informally with keynoters and panelists.) The textbook for the Institute is *Higher Education in the Internet Age* by Patricia Senn Breivik and E. Gordon Gee. The book is required reading before the Institute. The Institute faculty post supplementary readings on the course web site. Fellows submit a description of a project they would like to accomplish that focuses on an institutional priority. They meet with a small group with similar interests during the Institute to develop a strategy for their projects.

The curriculum consists of five learning modules. These modules progress in the following manner:
• Overview of the future of higher education
• Library planning in support of campus priorities
• Assessment and accreditation
• Maximizing financial resources through public relations and fundraising
• The staff as our most valuable resource

These topics are essential for beginning to understand the major shifts and trends in higher education and the impact of those on local institutions. After presentations by national leaders in each area, the Fellows participate in topical group discussions, or engage with a panel of experts regarding implications for libraries.

From these perspectives, the Institute fellows then can consider how their libraries can best position themselves to support institutions’ priorities. They can reflect on what their role is as change agents on campus.

**SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT FROM THE INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES**

Weiner and Caboni applied for funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) “21st Century Library Skills” program for scholarships. The purpose was for librarians from under-represented groups and from underserved institutions (historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges) to have access to external support to attend the Institute. Funding was awarded from 2007-2009 and provided tuition waivers for 30 librarians; 10 were used each year. Those who received funding were required to write an essay after they attended the
Institute on what they learned. These essays provided opportunities for assessing the value of the Institutes.

**MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF THE INSTITUTE**

Before the first Institute, PPI staff and the co-chairs gave careful thought to a multifaceted assessment strategy. The first assessment stage was twofold. The limit set on the number of participants was twenty-five, and the co-chairs based acceptance decisions on both an application form that included a professional statement (the chief means for judging leadership potential), and—once provisionally accepted—the completion of a project description. The latter provided an opportunity to make sure the applicants understood the external focus of the program. The co-chairs coached the applicants, as needed, in writing their learning outcomes. But the applicants had to be able to articulate a campus issue or concern that the library could help address to serve as a focus for their institute involvement before they could attend.

The second assessment stage dealt with program strengths and weaknesses. Participants completed evaluation forms for each of the modules at the end of each day of the Institute. They responded to some general questions on the last morning. The co-chairs reviewed the daily evaluations every evening. This often led to adjustments in the program the next day and/or listing loose ends in a “parking lot” to be discussed later in the institute. Indeed, the promptness of addressing concerns raised was an encouragement to participants to take their responses seriously. The daily feedback also led to more serious changes for the following years including changes in keynoters and panelists, providing pre-institute readings, eliminating formal reporting of small group
discussions, and changing parts of modules. For example, feedback made it clear that there needed to be a focus on how to make the transition from consideration of campus-wide planning to library planning even though that meant eliminating one of the other topics covered. The co-chairs decided to include fewer topics so participants could deal with the most important areas in greater depth.

It was not possible to resolve all issues. In particular, each class of Fellows has wanted more time devoted to the keynoters and other aspects of the agenda. After the first year, the co-chairs eliminated one module and since then have made minor adjustments for more efficient use of time; but any further elimination of topics covered would not allow for essential issues to be covered.

Though the daily evaluations provided good insights into program strengths and weaknesses, they did not provide information on what happened after participants returned to their campuses. How did they feel about the institute once they were back to realities? Did they share what they had learned? Did they use the work they had done on their projects? Did they see their roles any differently? Had they made subsequent career changes?

Some participants provided unsolicited comments after the Institute. Sometimes it was as informal as an email to one of the co-chairs saying, “Thank you so very much for the best educational event in which I have ever participated. Everything was first class…In a word, outstanding!” Or another who said, “When I got back to campus, I went around to academic departments asking them what I could do for them. At first they were surprised; but after awhile they decided they liked it!” Some Fellows sent news about their promotions to different positions or about new leadership roles they assumed.
But the greatest source of qualitative assessment after participants were back at their jobs came from the required essays written by participants who had received IMLS grants. Here is a sampling.

**How did they feel about the Institute after they were back at work?**

“I have not participated in a single program that dedicated so much of its strength to sharing and pairing ideas with colleagues…(I) hope the Peabody Professional Institute for Academic Library Leadership program remains small and inviting so that all who attend may benefit from such a wonderful and pleasant experience.”

“The participants’ group was small enough that it allowed all of us to get to know each other, have conversations and discover similar interests. It also made all of us aware that in spite of the differences in our backgrounds, especially when it comes to the size and type of our institutions, we all shared more or less the same kind of issues and concerns. We also recognized a spark in each other which made us want to be the change agents.”

**Did they share what they had learned?**

“I was able to return to my campus with ideas to share with my colleagues as well as formulate an action plan to address our camp’s primary challenge. My enthusiasm was embraced by my colleagues…Several of my colleagues have worked their own way through the reading lists and we have held informal discussions on the topics…The conversation continues.”

**Were they able to use the work they had done on their projects?**

“…the benefit from the institute with the most significant impact was my ability to walk away with an action plan for the project proposal that I submitted…participation in such institutes does not always allow for such concrete takeaways as an action plan.”
Upon my return to my home institute, I submitted this action plan to my director, who has encouraged me to pursue the plan.”

Did they see their roles any differently?

“I can honestly state that it was the best library conference that I have every attended in over 13 years as a professional librarian. I returned to my campus energized with many new and practical ideas on how to teach information literacy skills to our students and how to make the library an agent of change on my campus.”

“Since returning from the Institute I have had the opportunity to apply some of these ideas to initiatives ranging from library strategic planning to institutional re-accreditation…In all, my experience at the Institute helped shape my thinking about the academic library’s role in institutional transformation and I am drawing on these perspectives as I identify and pursue these roles on my home campus.”

“I had any number of ‘stop and think’ moments during discussions at the institute, which have already led me to cast a wider net for input on issues and projects, to re-evaluate several procedures, and to consider undertaking a major organizational change in focus while staying clearly within our stated mission.’’

**FUTURE PLANS**

After four years of working with the Fellows to enhance the Institute’s effectiveness, a solid foundation for future effort exists. Future plans include follow-up with the Fellows after the Institute to maintain contact with them and sustain the learning communities; a study of the influence of the Institute on the Fellows; and the possible
development of advanced and/or single-topic Institutes. These might cover topics that past Fellows requested for additional training, such as public relations and fundraising.

It is clear that attendance at the Institute is an enlightening and motivational experience for those who attend. It is also important to understand whether the Institute has an influence on the Fellows once they return to their institutions. There has been no study of whether the experience influences the long-term behaviors and decisions of the Fellows. This knowledge would provide evidence to support its continuance and the development of other institutes as effective means of professional development. Future studies may investigate the following questions:

- What career decisions and job changes did the Fellows make after attending the Institute? Did the Institute have an influence on those decisions and changes?
- Do the Fellows use what they learned from the Institute faculty, readings, and other Fellows for leadership decision-making?
- Did the Fellows implement the projects they developed as outcomes of the Institute?

In conclusion, the design of the curriculum for the Peabody Academic Library Leadership Institute meets a professional development need among academic library leaders. It provides an informative perspective on higher education and on ways to position libraries to support their parent institutions. It is helping to prepare capable and adaptable 21st century academic leaders.
REFERENCES


Cochrane, L. S. (2007). If the library ceased to exist, would we have to invent it?

Educause Review, 42(1), 6-7.


Resource Sharing and Information Networks, 17(1/2), 5-17.


Senior Fellows at UCLA. Retrieved August 11, 2009, from
http://is.gseis.ucla.edu/seniorfellows/index.htm.

approach: Professionalising the pedagogical role of academic libraries. Oxford:
Chandos Publishing.


university. The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 35(1), 3-13,