Transformation Change: The 9th Annual Health Science Lively Lunch

Ramune K. Kubilius
Northwestern University, r-kubilius@northwestern.edu

Pat Thibodeau
Duke University, thibo001@mc.duke.edu

Meg White
Rittenhouse Book Distributors, meg.white@rittenhouse.com

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TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE: THE 9TH ANNUAL HEALTH SCIENCE LIVELY LUNCH

Ramune K. Kubilius (r-kubilius@northwestern.edu) - Collection Development / Special Projects Librarian, Northwestern University, Galter Health Sciences Library

Pat Thibodeau (patricia.thibodeau@duke.edu) - Associate Dean for Library Services, Duke University Medical Library & Archives

Moderator: Meg White (meg.white@rittenhouse.com) - Director, Technology Services, Rittenhouse Book Distributors

Abstract:

Individuals within and outside of the field are predicting major changes for libraries. Health sciences libraries are already experiencing changes in space, budget, services, and user expectations. This session will explore some of the provocative views being generated about the future of health sciences librarians and libraries, and what directions, roles or services may need to consider. The session will touch upon such themes as changing user expectations, patron-focused collection development, fast tracking technical services, leaving behind our traditional physical structures, and considering new roles for our libraries and librarians.

Full-text

This Lively Lunch is intended to be a discussion of the transformational changes being seen by Charleston Conference participants, as well as being predicted by others in the field. While the speakers will provide an update on developments impacting health sciences libraries, and talk about some of the visions others have about future directions, the audience is encouraged to talk about their own experiences and the changes they have seen within their own libraries. Duke University Medical Center Library & Archives will be used as a “case study” for discussing environmental pressures, the responses of libraries to these pressures, and the transformational changes that some libraries choosing to pursue.

Ramune Kubilius will provide an overview of the news and trends that have occurred or were noted since the last Charleston Conference. This is not a comprehensive listing, nor does it endorse specific products or companies, but simply captures major developments. The handout of these developments is available.

Patricia (Pat) Thibodeau will talk about transformational change in health sciences libraries and lead the discussion where experiences and thoughts can be shared.

Transformational Change

There have been major changes in libraries and librarianship over the years. Large library buildings, and the size of the collections within them, used to be a sign of the strength of the library. However, it is no longer buildings and physical collections that are our strength. Now the librarians who select content, make it accessible, and teach people how to use or create new content are what libraries are all about. Administrators now focus on our service contributions and how libraries and librarians can use their many skills and expertise to assist the academic and health care communities. The concern is far less about space and collection and more about value to the institution.

Thought leaders in and around our field are challenging our vision for the future. While providing content is still important, budget, space and staffing challenges require changing how we think about ourselves. “We are more than our collections” was a phrase used at Duke when stack space was lost, but it has now morphed to “We are a collection of services, not a collection of collections.” While some of the visions or predictions for the future appear dire, librarians still have skills that are of value and that are essential to our communities. These skills include systems analysis, organization, dissemination of information including bringing people together, and resource allocators. We now must also become better strategists, aligning our services and resources with institutional priorities. And, librarians need to begin to apply these skills outside the library in different settings.

Thought leaders like the DaVinci Institute urge libraries to evaluate the library experience for users, embrace new information technologies as they appear, and experiment with creative spaces. Google, the Internet, and Web 2.0 have created a world of ubiquitous and seemingly instantaneous access to information. Formats for content are becoming more fleeting. We have gone from “information when and where it is needed” to “ubiquitous information access anywhere, anytime, any device” and now to “the right content to the right person at the right time”.

Adams Corson-Finnerty at UPenn in his blog tells us that it is time to say good-bye to our libraries. To say good-bye to the “sheer bulk” of our buildings and stacks. Libraries need to develop survival strategies that focus on a minimal footprint, digital delivery of services and resources, virtual customer support, and flexible staff who are constantly learning and are embedded into teaching, learning and the academic community.

Taiga is another group looking at the future. They see librarians moving to patron-driven collection development, the merging of public and technical services, and the reduction of library space. They also warn that administrators will view the library as a support service and not part of the academic or faculty side of the academy and that they will not look for librarians as leaders of libraries in the future.

The impact of tight financial times, budget reductions, and high price increases is transforming collection development. While libraries are still considered a social good, we are also now viewed as competitors for scarce resources and budget increases are becoming more difficult. There are also new types of resources, such as point-of-care tools that are competing for limited budget dollars. Here are some of the responses to these pressures: shifting to an all electronic journal collection; cutting book budgets to preserve e-journals; just-in-time (patron-driven) acquisitions instead of just-in-case; data driven selection; discarding older materials and relying on pay-per-view or interlibrary loan; purchasing on truly core and general materials; acquiring specialty materials only if it supports an institutional priority.

Technical services is another area that must change. Libraries need to stop cataloging, or at least doing the type of traditional cataloging we are used to. Cataloging should be purchased with materials and then not tweaked at all. Accept the call number, subject headings, and other information as it is. Stop tweaking the records. Do not worry about duplicate call numbers or designations of copies. Move to minimal cataloging for materials without cataloging and stop touching the CIP records. Use a shelf-ready acquisition system; check for quality but do not tweak the underlying classifications or cataloging. Free up the technical services staff to work in public services areas and focus on the content – selection and Web access. Spend time on truly unique materials that no one else has, but use templates for streamlining cataloging and

think about what is really needed in the record. Focus on metadata projects within archives, repositories, specialized databases, research data, and other broader projects within the institution.

Space is at a premium in most institutions and administrators are always looking for ways to maximize what exists instead of building new spaces. Libraries are often in central locations or near units that need expansion. Institutions also want to see space that is fully utilized; the space used for stacks is no longer viewed as a good use of expensive real estate. In addition, many schools or programs within universities are building facilities for students where they can gather to study, socialize, and access technologies. If those spaces exist and are increasing, what does that do to “library as place.” Libraries need to think about how spaces can be used to support educational and community or social activities. Libraries may want to invite people into their spaces to be neighbors, or use the facility in very different ways than the way it was initially designed.

Comments and questions from attendees were welcomed throughout the presentations. Participants discussed the changes they have been making and seeing in their libraries. Many were seeing decreased budgets, though a couple had seen increases in their budgets. Several commented on how they have streamlined and consolidated acquisitions, cataloging and other technical services functions. Potential loss or repurposing space was a common theme as well. Overall, publishers, subscription agents and librarians had a lively dialogue about the pressures and issues facing libraries and how libraries were responding to the economic downturn and institutional fiscal pressures.