

THE CORPORATE AND THE ACADEMIC, WITH A TWIST

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Abstract: Urban university libraries are uniquely positioned to be of service to the corporate world around them. There are good reasons for such ventures, among them being the impact on the economic and intellectual well being of the geographical area. Although the provision of library services to companies small and large is not new, our spin on the topic is. We have been motivated by goals not usually associated with such services. One central aim has to do with forging an alliance of science and engineering interests, especially with regard to polymers and materials science, to support the waning collections and purchasing power of individual enterprises, and to buoy the economic and scientific force of the industry in our urban area and beyond. Another has been to bridge the gap between students' experience with information resources while at the University and their practice when employed as researchers and technicians by local companies. Such effort speaks of service in a way not usually heard. This paper will first focus on the concepts and rationale of what has been called "a loose consortium." Then we will describe the creation of the infrastructure for library services for each corporation because each company had unique needs as reflected in their individual contracts. All companies needed assistance in some areas, like the acquisitions and management of print and electronic resources, the provision of current awareness services, specialist literature searches, and document delivery and copyright permissions. Some needed only selected assistance for things like recruiting and hiring personnel, managing existing print collections, and financial tracking of subscriptions and publishers licenses. We have managed to find the administrative means to be of good service to each and to all.

Background

Some say cooperate; we say collaborate. Others say outsourcing; we prefer insourcing. A few say fee-based service; we say partnership. These differences in modes of conducting library matters get at the root of the service philosophy of The University Libraries at The University of Akron (UAL). The UAL is an academic library, but in an urban university in a metropolitan setting, and that in great measure accounts for the way the Library does business. It may be because of the urban mission of the institution, or it could be a direct result of a group of peculiar circumstances, but whatever the source, the Library has taken initiatives to be of service to, and enter into partnership with, area organizations and businesses.

Urban university libraries are uniquely positioned to be of service to the geographic area around them. As Williams wrote in "The Urban University and its Library," these libraries need "to develop programs that recognize both the traditional role of libraries in the university and the unique situation of the university that is 'of the city.'" (Williams, p. 171). In 1997, The UAL established a formal collaborative relationship with the Akron Art Museum. Geographically teamwork made sense, since the Museum is located about five blocks from the University's campus. It has

accumulated around 10,000 volumes having to do with western art since 1850, with a specialty in contemporary art, which reflects the interests of the University's art history and studio art program.

Through one collaborative agreement, the UAL arranged to catalogue currently received materials, providing labor for free, while the Museum paid only actual costs to providers and suppliers. Through this agreement, the Art Museum was established as a virtual branch within the UAL's catalogue in return for providing copies of articles through interlibrary lending.

The two libraries have agreed on cooperative purchases of library materials in order to supplement areas of academic and research interest in both institutions. Duplication of serial holdings was virtually eliminated, so that each library has an expanded selection of periodicals available for their users. Internship programs for University students, and exhibits of shared art and bibliographic materials have been developed.

The Museum allows University of Akron faculty and students use of its book materials on site. Membership in library consortia, specifically OCLC, Ohionet, and OhioLink, has been attained for the Museum. Museum employees have full use of UAL collections and services, and selected statewide resources available through the academic library consortium, OhioLink.

The University's and the Museum's libraries investigated other ways to support each other's library service program. One idea resulted in the retrospective conversion of the Museum's card catalogue. With holdings in the online catalogue, there was further an opportunity through a grant to develop important connections between digital images of some of its art holdings and the bibliographic records of holdings in both libraries that are associated with them. The resultant database is being made available to the wider geographic area, and particularly to K-12 educators.

Collaboration and partnership make sense for these two non-profit organizations. All the elements are there – geography, academic interest, complementary collections, interest in public education and service to the public, and common missions – and they speak to ways to enrich the intellectual resources of the community that both institutions serve. Other ingredients, but primarily a subject-intensive one that ties directly to the economy of the area, led us to seek and respond to corporate partnerships.

The Emergence of Corporate Partnerships

The University of Akron is a well-established urban university whose identity is closely tied to the community. Indeed, Simons and Garten point out in their study that this University was “among the first actively to reach out” to the community in which it resided to establish important linkages. (pp. 45-46.) While The University of Akron now offers doctoral programs with national and international reputations, it is still very much perceived to be Akron's university, and, while teaching and research will always be its primary mission, it takes very seriously its responsibility to serve all the citizens of Ohio.

The UAL has a collection of over 1,400,000 volumes and subscribes to thousands of periodicals. Subject specialists have supervised collection growth for nearly forty years, and thus have created a strong, deep literature in several areas that are highly respected and much used by scholars.

The three library facilities house books, journals, and online resources supporting the humanities, social sciences, business, and performing arts, as well as a large collection of United States federal and state documents, and some public documents from foreign countries. In the overall collections, there is an interest in international business, along with strengths in Latin American area studies and a good collection of Canadiana. The library also houses materials having to do with local history and topics of local interest, plus various special and specialized collections in music, psychology, and other areas.

Of special importance to the geographic area is a major emphasis on collections that support curricula in science and technology and the professions leading to doctorates in polymers, chemistry, and all branches of engineering. Polymer science and polymer engineering is the preeminent discipline in the University, with a world-renowned, separately established college that is unique to academia. Library collections in these areas are unsurpassed in the larger region, and have traditionally been an informal resource to the public. Graduates of these programs have historically been sought out and employed, first, by the rubber and tire companies centered in Akron, and by the hundreds of polymer businesses that are springing up in the region.

Indeed The University of Akron, though it began as a private, religious-affiliated college, got caught up in the urban inspired municipal university phenomenon that Simons and Garten speak of, whereby, like others, it became “massive in sheer enrollment and range of programs” (p. 45) as it entered into its role as a large urban state supported university.

A Conceptual Framework for Academic and Corporate Library Collaboration

The UAL has come to see, with respect to area corporations, that area industries have their own set of basic information related issues. UAL began to discover what is unique about them and began defining library programs to address their role. As corporations downsize, split apart to form separately run companies, or begin as new enterprises, the need for information and research support becomes apparent. Often the industries seek out the University; just as often they are courted. It is geography, the preponderance of information resources, and research interest that help to define this merger of town/gown concentration.

Simons and Garten point out that urban academic libraries have long ventured out with their parent institutions into the community (p. 47). However, information services have generally fallen into the mode of a laundry list of services predicated on what we see as a traditional reference desk model -- that is, along the lines of “here are several services we will provide, and we will be glad to let you use them if you come to us.” Businesses can call if they need names and addresses, or request statistical information on competitors. Individual researchers may make appointments to have exhaustive literature searches done by trained search experts in their area. They maybe simply want to come and use the collection, do some photocopying, or request books and documents through the library’s sources for interlibrary loan and document delivery. (Simons and Garten, pp.47-52)

The University Libraries have taken a different tack on how they engage companies and their needs. Another tradition in larger academic institutions is that of subject specialists, bibliographers, who, rather than simply being available, reach out to

the faculty. They approach the academic departments, discerning their individual scholarly interests, work with them on collection development efforts that will match the curriculum and the research areas for graduate studies, and provide information support through bibliography preparation and the like. In effect, they proactively seek to customize service that matches the needs of their primary clientele – on their turf.

This spin on service mirrors that which the UAL is taking with respect to area corporations. Though it has a list of services that it can provide, the Library generally perceives the list as a point of departure for examining the real information needs. As seen in the Akron Art Museum example above, what it really needed was the ability to link more information resources to the art work in its collection. In other cases, a new, or newly spun off corporation, may not even have a library; what it needs most is a librarian.

The UAL also recognizes that all information services must withstand the pressures of budgetary constraints. The OhioLink experience for the UAL has shown the value of joint efforts in negotiating fair and focused prices. Since the area corporations are geared toward science and technology, combined efforts to reduce rates through a consortium of academic and corporate libraries (itself a rarity) have become part of the services offered, as is the UAL's experience in negotiating license agreements with publishers and service vendors.

In short, the arrangements with the various corporations with which the UAL works vary dramatically based on the specific requirements that get articulated through the contractual phase of the relationship. All companies needed assistance in some areas, like the acquisitions and management of print and electronic resources, the provision of current awareness services, and document delivery and copyright permissions. Some needed only selected assistance for things like recruiting and hiring personnel, managing existing print collections, and financial tracking of subscriptions and agreements. The UAL has managed to find the contractual and administrative means to be of good service to each and to all.

Operations: Making it Happen

A major consideration is the creation of a technical information infrastructure after a contract is signed between a client and what has been dubbed the Corporate Services Center (CSC). Oversight of daily operations for the CSC is housed in the Science and Technology (S&T) Library under the supervision of the head of that Library.

Currently, four companies contract with the UAL for information services. The first deal was with the Rubber Division (RD) of the American Chemical Society. More recent clients are: Advanced Elastomer Systems, LP (AES) <1996>; McDermott Technologies, Inc. (McDermott) <1999>; and OMNOVA Solutions, Inc. (Omnova) <2001>.

Of the four companies currently participating in the CSC, three have contracted with the UAL to hire, supervise and train staff, but for different reasons. AES had no library. Omnova was downsizing and eliminating a formal library. The RD wanted a person to conduct research for its 4000+ members. Individuals filling the positions needed a technical background in chemistry, polymer science or engineering. UAL has successfully recruited individuals with undergraduate and graduate degrees in science or extensive experience in technical libraries along with the MLS degree.

CSC librarians and staff hired by UAL need to be effective within the personnel structures and climate of two organizations, since the profit/not-for-profit sectors have unique cultures, particularly in the way in which knowledge products are used and shared (Dunn and Grealy, p. 175).

Within the company the CSC librarian needs to be seen as part of the team. This requires a proactive person who will seek out opportunities to interact with corporate co-workers and uncover their research needs while maintaining the necessary degree of confidentiality (this is an important issue for the corporate clients). Also, to be effective, things such as length of the working day, vacation, sick leave, health, retirement, and educational benefits (because they generally differ from those of their corporate co-workers) have to be made transparent to the contracting client. CSC and UAL librarians also can provide back up to each other during vacation and illness so that library services are provided to each client without interruption.

The consortium arrangement facilitates training opportunities and fosters an environment for sharing of subject expertise and database searching skills for all its members. Generally a section of each CSC meeting is reserved for this purpose.

AES and Omnova provide onsite office space and equipment in their corporate facilities, while the RD librarian by special arrangement works out of the UAL S&T Library. McDermott maintains its own facility and staff. The head of the S&T Library visits the corporate sites on a regular basis. The CSC librarians participate in S&T, UAL faculty, and CSC meetings. The CSC librarians also participate in appropriate meetings of their corporate clients. Each corporate client assigns a representative to coordinate the work of the CSC librarian with UAL.

Collections

All of the CSC clients were interested in being able to utilize the UAL and the OhioLink book collections and consequently agreed to make their book collections available through the UAL catalog either through gifting of the stock or through sharing the catalogue. The UAL worked with all clients to analyze their existing collections, their bibliographic control needs, maintenance costs, archival needs, and acquisitions processes and procedures for collection building.

Initially, AES had no print collection. As they built a small collection, it was cataloged by UAL. The RD had an extensive collection of their own publications as well as material from other publishers. This collection is partially cataloged and merged with the collections of the S&T Library. Omnova had an 11,000-volume collection of print materials with inadequate bibliographic control. After a donation of most of the entire collection, a plan was devised to weed and begin cataloguing the remainder. McDermott contracted with UAL for cataloging its 6,000-volume onsite collection. Integration of each client's collection into the UAL catalog makes it possible to use the UAL circulation subsystem for tracking materials. The merger also enriches the combined collection for research needs within the consortium and throughout the state of Ohio.

UAL orders for all CSC libraries. Group purchasing for monographs, databases, serials, and services is done through various UAL or CSC discount agreements. All participants benefit from cooperative collection development.

Each company had the option of donating its print collection to the UAL while maintaining it at the corporate site. Participating companies receive a tax advantage in

this arrangement while the UAL benefits by increasing the size and scope of its collection.

Literature Searching

Since all CSC libraries rely on electronic databases for literature searching and current awareness services, consortium licenses and subscription rates are negotiated with the result that all members are able to subscribe at significantly reduced rates. Group-training rates are negotiated as part of the license or subscription fee.

Consortium subscriptions to electronic databases are tailored to the size and needs of each client. Though all clients do not subscribe to the same subset of electronic resources, access in part to databases can be a feature of collective purchase.

Document Delivery and Copyright

Documents are provided to CSC clients from UAL collections and from commercial document delivery services. Scrupulous attention is paid to copyright issues. Interlibrary loan services for U of A faculty and students are kept completely separate from document delivery to companies. UAL established a blanket contract with the Copyright Clearance Center for requesting permission to provide copies. Each company established accounts with the Copyright Clearance Center for permissions for in-house photocopying and article distribution. Sometimes UAL can license databases or electronic journals to allow CSC members to “ride the contract.”

Financial Tracking

UAL accounting procedures provide detailed information about expenditures by category and by vendor. Personnel costs include salary, fringe benefits, and a per day rate to compensate substitute personnel to provide information services during vacation, illness or other absences of the contracted librarian. Detailed vendor costs are tracked for document delivery, copyright, subscriptions to databases and journals, acquisitions services, and cataloging and physical processing.

Conclusion

The CSC is still growing. We anticipate increases in the number of corporate clients and expansion of services. One new service that we are exploring is knowledge management. At a minimum we will be undertaking projects to assist our clients in the management of internal corporate documents such as laboratory notebooks.

There are significant advantages to the approach UAL is taking. For one thing, merged collections make for a formidable and historical science and technology collection in the geographic area. Students who graduate from the University and work in these companies can depend in large part on the same resources that they have known as students (and, in electronic media, on the same search engine and interface). As a functioning consortium, the group has clout when dealing with publishers and vendors, specifically because, as the administrative agent, the UAL must be able to explain and justify costing models to its members. And lastly, the success and methods of the library relationships has led to cooperation on equipment use and other university personnel deployed to the corporations for research assistance and teaching needs that lie outside

the scope of the UAL per se. The UAL becomes a good entrée for other collaborative ventures between the University and area companies.

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