



A Vital Role of Academic Library in Higher Education in the Digital Age

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Abstract:

An Academic library is a library which serves an institution of higher education such as Colleges and Universities. Academic libraries are dynamic instruments of education. They support the institutions, to which they belong, in fulfilling the objectives and advances their aims. They support the faculty in teaching and research programmes. The primary objective of these libraries is conservation and preservation of knowledge. This paper is mainly highlights for Features, What's HOT Today?, Focus on Teaching, Vital Role of Academic Library, Core Competencies, Tasks, Future Libraries and so on in detailed.

Keywords: Academic Library, Librarian, Skills, Challenges and Future Library.

1. Introduction:

An academic library is a library that is attached to a higher education institution and serves two complementary purposes: to support the curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. It is unknown how many academic libraries there are worldwide.

Librarian:

A librarian is a person who works professionally in a library, providing access to information and sometimes social or technical programming to users. In addition, librarians provide instruction on information literacy.

Academic Librarians:

Academic librarians are responsible for acquiring, organizing, managing and distributing library resources, and ensuring that library provision meets the needs of all its users.

Meaning- Academic Library:

- **Wikipedia:** An academic library is a library that is attached to a higher education institution and serves two complementary purposes: to support the curriculum, and to support the research of the university faculty and students. It is unknown how many academic libraries there are worldwide.
- A designated place, physical or digital, set aside to house scholarly research materials and materials supporting the academic, university, or college community and curriculum.
- A library attached to a higher education institution to support teaching, learning and research activities.

1.1. Features of Academic Library:

- Standard
- Physical sources
- Human resources
- Financial resources
- Information resources
- Work process
- Excellence service

1.2. Characteristics of a Successful Library:

- ❖ Library Environment and Physical Space
 - Work areas
 - Special display areas
 - Special activity corners
 - Decorations and display
- ❖ Administration and Management
 - Develops and manages an inventory of books
 - Inventoried and cataloged
 - Planning, evaluation and monitoring
 - Human and material resources are managed
 - Adequate budget
 - Appropriate technology
 - Orientation to visitors
- ❖ Program Management
 - Book lending programs
 - Literacy programs
 - Outreach programs
 - Library exchange activities
 - Support and input of members of the community

1.3. What Libraries Do?

- Build Community
- Gaming
- Innovate
- Maker spaces
- Promote Literacy
- Protect Your Rights
- Provide Access

1.4. What's HOT Today?

- Being connected 24/7
- Blogs
- Cell phones & texting
- Citizen journalism
- Faceted browsing
- Fast delivery and vodcasting
- Folksonomies
- Gaming & virtual realities
- Instant gratification
- Mashups
- Metasearching
- Online photo sharing
- Open source ILS desktop applications
- Open World Cat
- OpenID or one-time
- Plugins, add-ons, & extensions authentication
- Podcasting, screen casting
- RSS feeds & aggregators
- Social bookmarking
- Social networking
- Tagging
- User comments and ratings
- Web applications replacing
- Widgets and gadgets
- Wikis

2. Vital Role of Academic Library in Higher Education:

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan headed the report of the Library Committee of University Grants Commission in 1957 that dealt with in detail the role of the university library in academic development especially in the field of higher education. The above observations can be summarizing in the words as:

- The library is the heart of education
- Methods & fashion in education change from generation to generation, but each generation uses the library as a means of realizing its items; hence the library remains the great conservator of learning
- A quality education is impossible without a quality library
- A library is vital organ for proper exploitation of our intellectual resources
- A library is essential for maintenance of free access to ideas, and to the functioning of the untrammelled mind

The importance of the library's role in imparting and disseminating knowledge has, of late, been enhanced by developments in continuing education, distance education and the Open University system. The university / college libraries have assumed even greater importance in a country like India where the majority of students

cannot purchase the most essential books. The basic characteristic of a good library is its complete identification with its institution. The measure of its excellence is the extent to which its resources and services support the institution's academic pursuits.

2.1. Focus on Teaching & Learning:

Librarian is an Information Professional catering to the need of the users of the knowledge resource Centre. So, the whole service should be oriented to teaching and learning in both ways; on the one hand, there should be stress on providing excellent services to knowledge seekers and on the other hand, ample stress will be given to the staff to equip them with the latest knowledge in the field.

- Ask-a-Librarian
- Conference / Seminar hall
- Deputations in Seminar/Conference/Symposium
- In-House orientation programs
- Participation in UGC Orientation and refresher courses
- Proper In-Service training schemes
- Providing information commons
- Reference assistance
- Round –the – clock service
- Staff exchanges programs at Local/State/National/Regional and International level
- Training in ICT

2.2. Changing Role of Academic Libraries:

Academic libraries have always been regarded to be the nerve center of universities as these are responsible to support the teaching, research and other academic programs of the university. Now these libraries are passing through a phase of great transition being influenced by social, political, economic and technological developments that are taking place in the society. The era is over when academic librarians were involved in housekeeping jobs like classification and cataloging, etc. Now they have to act as the knowledge navigators and change facilitators to fulfill the clientele's specialized needs. For this, it has become essential to use cutting edge technology tools and techniques. The re-engineering of the teaching and learning framework is under way in the progressive universities worldwide. This provides a window of opportunity for their libraries to demonstrate their existing and potential contribution to educational change.

2.3. Effects of Change on Academic Libraries – (Thamhain):

- Collaboration in need of dealing with different organizations cultures and value
- Complex library system and cross-functional linkages
- Fast-changing multidimensional user needs
- High task complexities, risks, and uncertainties
- Increasing impact of IT on service delivery mode (Use of new means such as instant messaging, virtual reference desk, ask a librarian, Wiki's, blogs, podcasting, etc.)
- Intense competition in open global markets
- Need for continuous improvements, upgrades, and Enhancements
- Need for multidimensional skills, ability to deal with changing virtual learning environment
- Resource constraint, tough performance requirements

2.4. Seven Reasons Libraries are Essential, Now More Than Ever- (Sadie Trombetta, 2017):

- They offer free educational resources to everyone
- Libraries are safe refuges for the homeless and underserved populations
- They help boost local economies
- They play an important role in English language learning

- Libraries make communities healthier
- They preserve history, and more importantly, truth
- Libraries help connect communities

2.5. Ten Ways Academic Libraries Are Leading Change- (Claire O'Neill, 2018):

- Librarians as leaders of student affordability initiatives
- Libraries expand outreach programs to reach larger audiences on important topics
- Combining two of the best things: books and food!
- Expanding the possibilities of research direction
- Libraries are improving user experience
- Libraries are transforming their physical spaces
- Providing opportunities to promote projects and get published
- Librarians give students a platform to be heard
- Incentivizing research to enrich student experience
- Libraries connect the community and raise support

3. Traditional Roles of LIS Professionals - (Richard Harrington, 2001):

- Business Manager
- Change Agent, i.e. Technology Application Leader
- Collaborator
- Custodian
- Database Manager
- Educator
- Enabler/facilitator
- Evaluator
- Facilitator
- Fund-raiser
- Guide
- Image Maker
- Information Adviser/Instructor
- Information advocates
- Information Broker for both Print & Electronic Media
- Information gurus
- Information Manager
- Innovator/Web Site Designer/Builder/Manager
- Intermediary
- Knowledge
- Librarian
- Multi-media user
- Negotiator
- Policy Maker
- Provide network support
- Public Relations Officer
- System Designers
- Teachers/Trainers

3.1. Academic Librarian-Job Description:

- Answering readers' enquiries
- Assisting readers to use computer equipment, conduct literature searches etc
- Developing IT facilities

- Ensuring that library services meet the needs of particular groups of users (eg staff, postgraduate students, disabled students)
- Liaising with departmental academic staff, external organizations and suppliers
- Management of staff, including recruitment, training and/or supervisory duties
- Managing budgets and resources
- Promoting the library's resources to users
- Selecting, developing, cataloguing and classifying library resources
- Supporting independent research and learning
- Using library systems and specialist computer applications

3.2. Role of Academic Librarians for Researchers:

- Connecting with researchers to enhance the value of library services
- Contributing to institution-wide initiatives
- Ensuring easy access to high-quality content
- Helping researchers win research grants and contracts
- Helping to recruit and retain top researchers
- Increasing the visibility and research profile of the institution
- Promoting and exploiting new technologies and models of scholarly communication
- Providing a better work environment for researchers
- Representing the values of the institution and scholarship
- Working in partnership with academic departments

3.3. Academic Librarian Responsibilities:

- Assist researchers with literature searches using databases, printed resources and the internet
- Contribute to academic course development and liaise with academic departments
- Coordinate and deliver information and digital literacy sessions to students, researchers and staff
- Create, update and manage electronic and printed information resources
- Deal with budgets in relation to your allocated subject areas/departments and, in some cases, purchase resources
- Deal with user enquiries, which may involve one-on-one advice sessions
- Develop and manage collections of books and journals (both paper and electronic), as well as websites
- Establish and maintain effective working relationships with academic staff and students, as well as external bodies such as suppliers
- Keep up to date with developments in the library sector and participate in professional groups or networks.
- Manage and support the provision of reading lists and allocate length of loans
- Select, acquire and catalogue information using library and information software
- Take on responsibility, in some cases, for archives and other special collections

3.4. Academic Librarian Additional Responsibilities:

- Answering incoming reference questions via telephone, postal mail, email, fax, and chat
- Assessing library services and collections in order to best meet library users 'needs.
- Assisting job seekers and local businesses
- Building and maintains collections to respond to changing community needs or demands
- Creating pathfinders
- delivering arts and cultural activities to local communities
- Developing programs for library users of all ages and backgrounds.
- Digitizing collections for online access
- Facilitating and promoting reading clubs.

- Initiating and establishing creative digital activities to introduce children to coding, engineering and website building
- Making and enforcing computer appointments on the public access Internet computers
- Managing access to electronic information resources.
- Marking promotion and advocacy of library services
- Publishing articles in library science journals
- Referring patrons to other community organizations and government offices.
- Researching topics of interest for their constituencies.
- Reviewing books and journal databases
- Suggesting appropriate books ("readers' advisory") for children of different reading levels, and recommending novels for recreational reading.
- Working with other education organizations to establish continual, lifelong learning and further education initiatives
- Writing grants to gain funding for expanded program or collections

4. Key Skills for Academic Librarians:

- Assessment of resources and library users' needs
- Presentation and verbal communication skills
- Strong IT skills and familiarity with the use of databases and the internet
- Subject-specific knowledge or expertise in a particular function, for example ICT resources or resource ordering
- Team working and management skills

4.1. General Skills:

- A flexible approach to work
- An appreciation of the pressures and demands within the academic work environment
- Capability to priorities your work and meet deadlines
- Communication and presentation skills
- Customer service and interpersonal skills
- IT skills
- Negotiation and problem-solving skills
- Organizational and self-management skills
- Research skills
- The ability to lead and motivate others
- The ability to think logically
- The ability to work as part of a team but also on your own initiative

4.2. Special Skills Plan of Academic Libraries:

- Information Services
- Information Technology (IT) and Digitization
- Library Research
- Management and Leadership
- Quality Assurance
- Support Services
- Technical services and E-resources
- Training & Development

4.3. Core Competencies for Academic Librarian:

Unlike assets, which do deteriorate over time, Competencies are enhanced as they are applied and shared. Basic core competencies are listed below;

- Accountability
- Adaptability
- Change management skills
- Charismatic leadership and embrace innovation
- Communication
- Customer focus
- Customer/Quality Focus
- Decision making
- Develop and sustain the library presence
- Development library fund and Strategic investment
- Development scholarly content and hassle free dissemination
- Digital infrastructure and support
- Diversity support
- Dynamism
- Efficient resource planning
- Excellence
- Foster organizational culture and staff development
- Inclusiveness
- Initiative and creativity
- Innovation
- Institution management
- Integrative and global thinking skills
- Knowledge accumulation: education and life-long learning
- Knowledge dissemination: service
- Knowledge inquiry: research
- Knowledge organization
- Leadership
- Library research, public participation and engagement
- Managing and marketing library service
- Managing and preserving resource
- Occupational Knowledge/Technology Orientation
- Open access, leadership and open choice
- Problem Solving/Decision Making
- Professional ethics
- Quality
- Reliability
- Research commons
- Resource building
- Safety watch
- Self-Assessment
- Strategic alliance and scholarly collaboration
- Strategic thinking
- Students' engagement and participation
- Team Focus
- Technological knowledge
- Transformational library leadership
- Work culture
- Work ethics and values

- Working relationships

4.4. Strategic Thinking:

- Being creative-moving beyond logic
- Dealing with many inputs at once
- Discriminating between events
- Exploring systematically
- Having a conceptual framework
- Integrating data with theory
- Linking process and output
- Responding to an audience/environment
- Scanning widely
- Seeing the big picture
- Selecting the right data
- Transferring learning from one experience to another

5. Tasks for Librarians in the Digital Era- (Zhou Futhermore, 2005):

- Describe the content and attributes of items (metadata)
- Design the technical architecture of digital library
- Design, maintain and transmit add-valued information products
- Ensure information security
- Establish friendly user interface over network
- Plan, implement, and support digital services such as information navigation, consultation and transmit services
- Protect digital intellectual property in network environment
- Select, acquire, preserve, organize and manage digital collections
- Set up relative standards and policies for the digital library

5.1. Challenges before Academic Librarians of Libraries:

- Availability of full-text materials on the Internet
- Better abstracting and indexing systems
- Better document delivery systems
- Changed users information behavior and reading habits
- Collection development
- Concept of 24 hours and 7 days library and information services
- Demand for web based products and services
- Demand for effective monitoring and feedback system
- Demand for quality based library and information products and services
- Demand for the creation of culture for creativity
- Diversity of programs and emerging thrust areas
- Emergence of library networking and networks
- Expectation for resource generation
- Explosive growth of electronic information and products
- Faster direct communication among scientists and researchers
- Impact of ICT on library practices
- Increased and diversified users information thrust and need
- Increased cost of information materials
- Marketing of library and information products and services
- Need for effective and efficient users interface
- Need for interaction with external environment

- Need for the development of information infrastructure
- Need to create specialized databases
- Need to develop sustainable collection building strategy
- New electronic information environment
- New roles and responsibilities
- New tools and techniques of information handling
- Philosophy of information at door
- Resource sharing through networking
- Responsiveness and dynamism in special library systems and services
- Timely delivery of information materials to end-users
- Virtual vs. onsite reference service: push and pull technologies

6. Library Should Be:

- Accessible
- Comfortable
- Compact
- Constant in environment
- Economic
- Extendible
- Flexible
- Organized
- Secure
- Varied

6.1. Future Trends:

- Artificial Intelligence
- Closing the gap between biology & technology
- Increased free time
- Increasing Entrepreneurial/Flex work force
- International Wireless Network
- Project-based workforce
- Prosumers rather than Consumers (producers-consumers)
- Virtual Education

6.2. Future Libraries:

- University and college libraries will be increasingly expected to open their resources to visiting students and scholars, in the process increasing the need for sensitivity to cultural differences.
- Librarians must continually assess their current services against the new breed of student they will serve, re-examining how and what they teach students about using libraries while providing a variety of learning experiences through various media
- To meet the learning styles of future students, libraries will have to rethink existing and future facilities to include a variety of spaces for consultation, collaboration, and instruction to foster varied learning needs. As the demand for more experiential learning grows libraries must invent and present to their communities spaces and facilities that invite, inspire, and support a culture of intellectual engagement and exchange, becoming studios and laboratories for faculty and students to engage in learning activities
- Libraries will need to respond to the growing interest in interdisciplinary program by improving communication with participants and becoming flexible in supporting program resource needs.
- As college campuses become more “green,” libraries will also have to infuse sustainability into their planning and operation.

- As libraries shift their centers of gravity from storage and physical collections in central spaces, they must establish settings for a mix of social and academic activity that encourage and support “high energy” learning by providing spaces for communities of learning to happen

6.3. Conclusion:

Academic Librarians of this digital era, are in the position to change their role as arbitrary information scientists/gatekeepers and to meet the challenges of the Internet, World Wide Web, and online access in the knowledge society. So they must enrich their knowledge with special skills of the latest IT developments, to browse, access and retrieve a particular information across the global networks and to organize and manage the information by building digital libraries and by which they can provide quality e-information service to the knowledge society. Library staff must be capable of working effectively in partnership with faculty members to enhance the strength of teaching and research.

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