POSITIONING THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

Changes and Challenges

John Cox, University Librarian, National University of Ireland Galway
Outline

- What positioning is and why it’s important
- Shifting sands: higher education drivers and priorities
- Challenges and competitors for libraries
- Library opportunities, strategies and changes
- Issues of communication and perception
- Some dilemmas and balancing acts
WHAT IS POSITIONING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?
Positioning Defined

**positioning, n.**

Pronunciation: Brit. /pəˈzɪʃ(ə)n/, U.S. /pəˈzɪʃ(ə)n/.

Frequency (in current use): 


1. The action of putting a person or thing in a certain position, esp. an effective or advantageous position; (also) the fact of being in a certain position or location.

1884—1986

2. Marketing (orig. U.S.). The identification of a product, service, or business as belonging to a particular market sector; strategic or distinctive promotion within a targeted market sector.

1957—2000
What Does Library Positioning Affect?

- Resource allocation
- Influence with institutional leadership
- Stakeholder perceptions
- Academic or service grouping
- Location in hierarchy

Figure 7: "I am considered by academic deans and other senior administrators to be a member of my institution's senior academic leadership." Percentage of respondents who strongly agreed with this statement.
SHIFTING SANDS: HIGHER EDUCATION DRIVERS AND PRIORITIES
Expectations of Higher Education

“Government officials see higher education as a national resource. Employers view higher education institutions as producers of a commodity—student learning. Top academic faculty expect higher education institutions to support and promote cutting-edge research. Parents and students expect higher education to enhance students’ collegiate experience, as well as propel their career placement and earning potential.”

## Some HE Drivers and Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers and Challenges</th>
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<tr>
<td>Greater accountability</td>
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<td>Stronger competition for students and research funding</td>
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<td>Higher student expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology-driven learning and research</td>
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<td>Internationalisation</td>
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<td>Challenging financial environment</td>
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Core Priorities for HE Institutions

- Student success
- Internationally recognised research
- Community engagement
- Global reputation
- Impact, often metrics-based
CHALLENGES AND COMPETITORS FOR LIBRARIES
Challenges to Positioning

- User self-sufficiency, independence
- Virtual use may mean invisibility, being taken for granted
- Where is the heart of the campus?
- Busy academics less supportive
- Larger institutional leadership portfolios reduce attention
- Higher expectations vs declining resources
- What is the identity of the library today?

“Academic libraries are no longer the symbolic “heart of the university””

Competitors

- On-campus “collab-itors”:

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<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Digital Preservation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Office</td>
<td>Open Access</td>
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<td>Institutional Research</td>
<td>Bibliometrics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning/Teaching Centre</td>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
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- Alternative external information providers:
LIBRARY OPPORTUNITIES, STRATEGIES AND CHANGES
Strategies

- Turning institutional priorities to advantage
- Providing leadership
- Refocusing and rebranding
- Reorganising teams and roles
- Partnering and converging
- Communicating value
Turning Institutional Priorities To Advantage

Priority

- Distinctiveness
- Research impact
- Student success
- Independent learning
- Community engagement
- Maximising resources

Opportunity

- Archives and special collections
- Open digital publishing
- Information literacy
- Interactive learning spaces
- Heritage collections, exhibitions
- Partnership
Providing Leadership

- Digital scholarship projects and infrastructure
- The open agenda
- Research data management
- Combatting fake news
- Learning space design

GALWAY SYMPOSIUM ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Friday June 15, 2018

2:00 Panel Discussion:
 Libraries as innovative learning spaces
 Chair: John Cox, University Librarian, NUI Galway

This panel discussion will address questions including:
- What do students expect of libraries today?
- How can libraries enable new modes of learning?
- Can traditional libraries be re-engineered or are new buildings needed?
- Where do libraries fit into the campus learning spaces strategy?
- How to develop and sell a new vision of libraries for learning?
Refocusing and Rebranding

- From collections to users
- Library or learning commons?
- Collections: outside-in or inside-out?
- Library as scholarly partner
- New paradigms*:
  - The computational library
  - The globalised library
  - The boundaryless library

Reorganising Teams and Roles

- Outward facing, user engagement trend
- Strategic relationship roles, eg Nottingham
- Multi-professional teams
- Specialist posts at higher grades

Organizing the Work of the Research Library

Johns Hopkins University Libraries
  Digital Scholarship Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries
  Digital Development Manager
  Metadata Encoding Specialist
University of Rochester Libraries
  Digital Humanities Sr. Technical Assistant
University of Tennessee Libraries
  Data Curation Librarian
York University Libraries
  GIS and Map Librarian

Reimagining outreach

Many of the leaders interviewed for this project were passionate about strengthening the libraries’ relationships with faculty members and students and the services they provide in support of research, teaching, and learning. Many see the liaison program (whatever it may be called) at the heart of these efforts. Several directors emphasized the importance of having the entire library organization—not just liaisons—focused outwardly. The efforts to achieve this vision of stronger relationships and greater engagement are grouped together here under the term “outreach.”

Partnering and Converging

- Being of the university first and the library second
- Partnership/Superconvergence for student success:
  - Library as base for student-facing services
  - Commonly IT, writing, maths support
  - May embrace administration, welfare, careers etc
  - Library director often in lead role
- Research collaborations, eg:
  - Open access, data curation, digital scholarship
  - Research Office, IT, Digital Humanities

Communicating Value

- A different value proposition
  - Traditionally collection size, book issues, etc
  - Now focused on impact, outcomes, priorities

- Examples include:
  - Information literacy impact on student success
  - Open access citations
  - Archives engagement

- Communication vital via multiple channels, eg:
  - Strategy documents
  - Institutional data collection systems
ISSUES OF COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTION
Communication Deficits

Approximately eight in ten respondents indicated that the most important priority for their library is supporting student success, although only about half of respondents reported that their library has clearly articulated how it contributes towards student success.
Missed Opportunities

Only 17 libraries (27%) made explicit connections between their plan and the larger university plan.

Only seven documents (11.1%) included goals relating to student recruitment, retention, persistence, or other success factors. These references were often vague.
Strategic Disconnection?

Figure 6: “My direct supervisor and I share the same vision for the library.” Percentage of respondents who strongly agreed with this statement.
Limited Recognition

Provosts’ Perceptions of Academic Library Value and Preferences for Communication: A National Study

Adam Murray and Ashley Ireland

Involvement with University Initiatives

The survey asked provosts to respond to how involved they perceived their institution’s academic library to be in undergraduate retention initiatives, enrollment initiatives, student academic success, faculty research productivity, and accreditation. The highest percentage of provosts answered that they perceived the library to be "somewhat involved" with each of these institutional initiatives with the exception of enrollment, which received a slightly higher percentage as being "marginally involved."

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When asked why provosts did not view their institutions’ academic libraries as being involved with undergraduate retention initiatives, provosts overwhelmingly indicated that it was because the campuses overall did not recognize the role the libraries could play in retention initiatives (76.12%).
Traditional Perspectives

It is undoubtedly the case that some people outside the library profession construe ‘the library’ in very traditional ways. That was true of our non-library participants – some still seeing libraries primarily as storehouses of books. One participant referred to the word ‘library’ as an ‘old-fashioned term’, basically linked to a building. One library manager interviewed recognised this, stating:

The university – they are not aware of what we are doing when we are not a physical building. (Library manager)
Indifference

2.1 The library as a concern: not a problem

All the respondents said that the library was ‘not a problem’ and not therefore on institutional risk registers within the university because there were no major issues or complaints about it to senior management:

I sit on the board of my university, and the number of questions and issues that come up relating to the library in terms of a risk or an issue – or, dare I say it, an interest – is hardly any. (Non-library participant)
SOME DILEMMAS AND BALANCING ACTS
Pros, Cons and Trade-offs

- Partner/Service
- Local/External
- Registrar/Chief Operating Officer
- Collaboration/Competition
- Diversity/Identity
- Generosity/Credit
Source of References

https://tinyurl.com/y8bkerpq