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## **TRENDS IN U.S. ACADEMIC LIBRARIES**

*U.S. academic business libraries are undergoing many changes in response to trends in business schools, the information industry, and in the library profession. This article identifies six trends in academic business libraries that were discussed at the Copenhagen Business School in 1997. After almost two years, most of the trends are still visible.*

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■ In June, 1997, I had the privilege of spending two days with the staff of Denmark's Copenhagen Business School Library. I was invited to talk to them about trends I saw developing in U.S. academic business libraries. CBSL is an organization that has undergone substantial change to meet the information needs of a 21st century business school. Serving one of the largest business education programs in Europe, this library's staff is very interested in global trends related to acquiring and delivering business information to faculty and students. This article discusses the trends of two years ago, and indicates that in 1999 they still may be observed in some academic business libraries.

The six trends are:

1. *Learning to Function in New Political and Funding Environments*
2. *Cooperation Rather than Competition Among Business Libraries*
3. *Using Technology to Move Outside the Walls of the Business Library*
4. *The Changing Nature of Collections/Information Resources*
5. *The Changing Nature of Reference Services*
6. *Redefining the Role of the Academic Business Librarian*

My presentation in Copenhagen began by examining the reporting patterns of U.S. academic business libraries. The ability of a business librarian to keep up with trends is often closely related to the organization providing the funding, the business school or the university library system.

There are typically three types of reporting structures:

- *reporting to and funded entirely by the business school administration*
- *located in the business school, but reporting to and funded by the central library administration*
- *a department within the main library (e.g., business reference center, business/government documents department, social science reference service, etc.)*

The first type includes schools like Harvard, Stanford, and Copenhagen; the second U.C. Berkeley, UCLA, and Ohio State; and the third SUNY-Buffalo, University of Chicago, and others. The second type is the most common among the top 20 U.S. business schools.

There are advantages and disadvantages of each type, but when the library is funded by a business school, and the library director reports to the dean or associate dean, it is more likely that the library is able to follow the mission of the school. In the second and third types,

funding and priorities come from the central library administration. It is not uncommon for the goals of the two administrations to be different. Strategic plans are set by the organization the library reports to; the business school may have one set of priorities, the central library administration another. Those of us in the second and third categories wrestle with this situation on a daily basis. Library administrators and business school deans occasionally do not see things the same way. As a result, some business schools have supplemented the budgets of category two and three libraries so that services to students and faculty may be improved.

The libraries/departments in the second and third types of reporting structures often have significant linkages to broader social science information resources of interest to some business school faculty. They are also able to tap the expertise of centralized technical services departments, and business librarians are able to participate in committees and task forces reviewing issues related to the campus-wide mission of the university library.

The evaluation of business schools has been occurring for a number of years. Rankings, such as the one by *Business Week*, have created popularity contests among the schools covered by the annual survey. Student services, including the business library, have had to introduce a higher level of customer service to keep students happy. Some business libraries also experience annual reviews from the business students they serve. The information resulting from the review can be quite useful to managers in evaluating the overall impact of reference services, instruction, and collection development.

## TRENDS

The six trends are not unique to the U.S., but can be observed around the world. Visitors to Berkeley from Europe and Asia have confirmed the same types of changes in their libraries. In 1996, I visited the Business & Economics Library at Bocconi University in Milan, Italy. This rather traditional business library was being dragged into the 20th century, and prepared for the 21st, by a visionary library director. She was able to observe what was happening outside of her organization and use that information to convince her business school administration

that they must provide resources to follow what was happening outside Italy.

### **1. Learning to Function in New Political and Funding Environments**

The 1970s and 1980s were mostly a period of tremendous growth and accomplishment for American business libraries. Collections significantly grew, staff size and quality improved, and the electronic age began. Now in the late 1990s there are increasing concerns about the high and rapidly rising cost of library operations, particularly collections. Revolutionary developments in computer and communication technologies are impacting all aspects of a librarian's job. Research has already been profoundly affected by the computer, and the same technology, including even e-mail, is starting to affect the way people think about libraries.

Libraries, of course, are not the only places where change is taking place. The following quote from *Mortgage Banking* indicates the dramatic changes taking place in banks and in customer expectations of banks. "As technology transforms the financial services marketplace, the concept of the bank is being redefined. The traditional marble palace will be a relic. Consumers want convenience and seem not to care if it is a traditional branch or an ATM in a grocery store, as long as it works." These same changes can also be observed in libraries as students and faculty want more remote access to resources. Will our marble palaces also be disappearing?

This is a transitional time for business libraries; it is hard to predict what and when things will happen. Leading and coping with constant change is a typical activity of business library managers. Some of the challenges are:

- *Learning to operate in a fluctuating resource environment is a new challenge for many academic business library managers. The age of having to constantly justify and rethink library operations and information resources definitely is with us. At recent meetings of business librarians, colleagues have been discussing increased requests to justify their existence. Administrators are asking tough questions such as "isn't everything on the internet" or "is it really necessary to waste*

*valuable space housing old books?" Some libraries are receiving operating cuts from business schools, or central library administrators, as library funding is moved to other purposes. Vacant staff and librarian positions are often not filled for long periods of time, or completely eliminated. A recurring question in many universities facing funding challenges is "which is more important, the library, or top quality faculty? The cost of information resources appears to be out of control and many libraries have had to begin major serials cancellation projects to keep a core collection of journals available to students and faculty. Libraries are expensive to operate and require valuable space that could be used for other business school purposes, such as expanding profitable evening MBA and executive education programs. Many of the top 20 business schools have recently built fancy new buildings, including libraries. It will be interesting to see how these libraries maintain their current square footage as business school programs grow and deans start to look for space.*

- *Trying to keep up with the technology that is driving change in most of our traditional library functions is a major budget and training challenge. Resources once available for collections and staff are now being directed toward the regular replacement of obsolete computer equipment and the latest software.*
- *Retraining and coaching library staff to implement the changes our organizations must go through is a daily activity of managers. Job descriptions and classifications are in need of major revisions to reflect the new roles of many staff. Some staff simply cannot function in the new environment and alternatives need to be found for them.*
- *Handling demands for new and improved services coming from our students and faculty often challenge existing staff. MBA students, in particular, have great expectations of library resources and services, since they often pay premium fees for their degrees. Trying to maintain a balance in library operations and services to keep everyone happy is an ongoing juggling act.*

The competition for resources in universities is encouraging librarians to learn fundraising skills. Many new buildings, including library

facilities, are being privately funded, even in public universities. Library managers have had to learn how to court potential donors and to develop proposals that encourage investment from them, including funds for collections and electronic services. University of California, Berkeley selectors recently had to write case statements for the collections they manage with funding ideas for potential donors. These case statements described typical faculty research and new books they had published, special strengths of the existing collection, and specific funding opportunities. Fundraising can be an interesting and very challenging part of a librarian's job. Doing lunch and making the social function circuit needs to be a major addition to librarian job descriptions.

## 2. Cooperation Rather than Competition Among Business Libraries

The top U.S. business schools are very competitive organizations. They are vying for excellent students, superstar faculty, funding, and, perhaps most of all, for status. All schools want to be #1 in the rankings.

Although the business schools are competitive, the new political and funding environment has encouraged cooperation among many business libraries; few can afford to completely operate as independent empires. Cooperation, and this means more than interlibrary loan, is on the increase. The need to provide high quality services to students and faculty has encouraged the positive aspects of working together and, with new personalities in libraries, things are happening.

Examples of cooperative endeavors include working in groups to influence the pricing of electronic products. Some vendors such as *Bloomberg*, *Lexis/Nexis*, *OneSource*, and *UMI* have received group reactions to pricing of their electronic services. The Academic Business Library Directors' group has had discussions on pursuing a cooperative project to digitize back runs of pre-1970 corporate annual reports. Many of the major business libraries have long runs of old paper reports that would be very useful to some scholars in a web-accessible format. The same group is exploring the possibility of expanding retrospective coverage of business journals on *JSTOR*. Information sharing is an important part of cooperation and

leads to it. Using electronic discussion lists to share information and to ask questions is a very useful benefit of technology. Also, personal contacts at other universities allow us to request special help when needed, such as rush faxing of articles or other needs. This is an attitudinal change, it has not always happened.

Even though some progress has been made in cooperation, there is still much to do. It might be interesting to start a program to divide up responsibility for research-level book collecting in business. Subjects could be divided among several libraries to guarantee that at least one copy of each book in advertising, finance, international business, management, marketing, and other fields would be available in a geographic area. This is happening in other fields, particularly area studies, where formal collecting agreements have been signed among several universities. Another idea is to share the expertise of business bibliographers who could potentially work for more than one institution. Teleworking is happening worldwide, why not in academic business libraries?

## 3. Using Technology to Move Outside the Walls of the Business Library

Technology is allowing libraries to expand their reach as never before. Many business libraries are looking for ways to take the collections to the user, rather than have the user come into the library.

A 1997 article in *Brandweek* contained the following statement:

"There is a growing sensibility, some might call it a sense of apprehension, among many entertainment executives that by the year 2010, technology will have advanced to such a degree that every entertainment need will be satisfied within the 4 walls of a home. They are of the opinion that such high tech happenings as in-home virtual concerts or theater will render the age-old, time-honored concert going experience obsolete."

Similar statements have been made in relation to libraries and their futures. By 2010, who really knows what library collections and services will look like. Whatever happens, we do know now that the field of business information is rapidly evolving into delivery to the desktop.

There has been a dramatic growth in web-accessible resources during the past two years. The U.S. investment banking firm of Morgan Stanley estimated in 1996 that the market for internet related products and services appears to be growing more rapidly than early markets for print publishing, telephone, film, radio, recorded music, television or personal computers. Students and faculty want to access and use information all hours of the night and day. Some libraries have articulated a goal to have so much available remotely that students would have little need to come into the library at all. Library staff would provide training at the beginning of the term, students would use resources remotely, and librarians would be available for consultation by telephone, e-mail, or by appointment.

The advantages of web access to information resources have already proven themselves to users and to library managers who no longer have to worry about maintaining CD-ROM networks and hiring staff to load disks. Dependability and speed of access have considerably improved in the last two years with new innovations in networks, hardware, and web software. The major concerns in providing access outside the library walls are user authentication and budgeting for an adequate, but affordable number of simultaneous users.

#### 4. *The Changing Nature of Collections/Information Resources*

The 1990s introduced the beginnings of a significant change in the way many of the academic business librarians viewed their collections. Librarians used to talk about the number of volumes and serial titles in their libraries. This seems to have changed with the introduction of information technology and the ability to access some traditional print resources in electronic formats. With services such as *Nexis Academic Universe* or *Dow Jones Interactive*, libraries have the ability to instantly add thousands of magazines, journals, and newspapers to their collections. Although print numbers are still collected and reported, they don't mean so much anymore.

Observations by many business librarians indicate that changes in use patterns are occurring in their libraries. Students are rarely interested in a good business book to read and

book checkout is declining in some business libraries. Finding periodical articles has become almost totally electronic; print periodical indexes are seldom used, except by the few needing pre-1970 information. Students want to download every conceivable type of data set or text file and balk at having to use a print source. Numeric services such as *Datastream* are very popular, but require extensive staff assistance.

Some academic business libraries have reduced their purchase of books to fund electronic resources. This change in collecting strategy can be understood with the demand for databases, but who will be responsible for developing and maintaining broad, deep collections in business, or will scholars simply have no need for these resources in the future? Few business libraries have fulltime, or even half time, positions devoted to collection development.

Many business school faculty do not rely on the library as the major source for the information they need—why? Frequently, they are working on research where they must use primary sources, such as internal company records, interviews with executives, custom surveys of employees, or they need specialized data files that libraries have not been able to provide due to cost, lack of proper computing equipment, or staff expertise to handle. Library collections are more likely used for historical verification, studying related works of colleagues, and checking on methodologies and research strategies.

Library collecting practices are changing to reflect new interests in business schools. Subjects such as electronic commerce, financial engineering, web development and pricing, and others did not exist a few years ago. Traditional fields such as international business have really taken off. Interest in the global economy is big in U.S. libraries. This is a change from the days when students were almost exclusively interested in U.S. companies and U.S. markets. The internationalization of many courses in the business school curriculum is very noticeable at reference desks. Business librarians are scrambling to improve their information resources and instructional programs to meet the demand for an ever-increasing amount of information on foreign companies, markets, customs, products, taxation, and other topics. International students often account for a significant percentage of MBA enrollments and

they expect to find extensive resources covering the business scene in their home countries.

In 1997, I posed the question "Is the Electronic Business Library here yet?" At that time, it had not arrived in Berkeley or Copenhagen, but in two years there are definite signs of it on the horizon. As mentioned concerning the previously discussed trend, the electronic text of business magazines and newspapers is already commonplace in business libraries. Since 1997, the delivery of academic journals to faculty desktops has become a reality in many business schools. The rapid growth of interest in the electronic library is forcing librarians to examine their policies/attitudes on access versus ownership (e.g., archiving information). Fantastic information services may be available online, but the ability to preserve the information for future use may be in jeopardy should the content provider decide to curtail coverage. The just-in-time versus just-in-case philosophy is often presented as a model for business libraries to follow. A senior officer of a major U.S. content provider made the following statement in a talk in Hong Kong in 1997. "Today, progressive information professionals increasingly follow the example of the manufacturing community. They seek ways to deliver information 'just in time'— the right information, at the right place, in the right format, at the right time." What he didn't mention is "at the right price." The access versus ownership issue is likely to challenge librarians for some time.

Some of us who have been in the profession for a long time, and who have been involved in introducing and leading change, are worried about the future of research collections. For example, are business libraries becoming a McDonald's of fast information with no depth to our information resources? Is it important to keep a balance of print and electronic despite outside pressures? What is our archival responsibility for business and economic information? Budget problems force difficult decisions to be made about print versus electronic; duplication is often not an option. Are restrictions on who may use some electronic information, and for what purpose, changing the library's basic mission and philosophy? These and other issues will have to be resolved in the near future.

### 5. *The Changing Nature of Reference Services*

With all of the technological impacts and collection changes in business libraries, what are the trends in reference services? Most of us would agree that today's business student wants fast and easy access to information. They are accustomed to punching a few numbers into an ATM and out comes money, they want the same for information. Expectations of business reference librarians are high and library users have dreams of instant answers at reference desks. This places considerable stress on staff who need to keep current with a vast and changing array of print and electronic information sources. Unlike many subject areas, business reference is not bibliographic verification or searching for known published papers or conference proceedings. Students ask very specific questions and expect librarians to lead them directly to the data requested.

Despite continuing demands for reference, there is a growing feeling among some business library managers that the nature and type of library reference service has to change. Aren't students and faculty smart enough to find information for themselves without relying on just-in-case reference staffing? Are there other ways of providing service without staffing a reference desk for a fixed number of hours each day? Some business libraries have substituted consultations by appointment, e-mail reference, roving librarians asking students if they need help, combining circulation and reference points, opening reference satellites in faculty office clusters, and other means of providing service as alternatives to a regularly scheduled reference desk in the business library. This, of course, is not happening everywhere. Many business libraries still believe in the basic function of the reference desk and continue to support the service.

The concept of user self-sufficiency is also affecting attitudes toward providing traditional reference service in business libraries. Using the power of the World Wide Web to offer self-help approaches to finding business information is on the increase. Local catalogs are moving to a web-based format with lots of easy instructions and links to other resources, all at one logon. Many



content providers are designing services to meet the needs of the individual without the assistance of librarians. The introduction of services such as *Dow Jones Interactive*, *Nexis Academic Universe*, and *OneSource's Business Browser* makes it very easy for students and faculty to help themselves with many basic company and industry information requirements.

#### 6. *Redefining the Role of the Academic Business Librarian*

As the first five trends have indicated, this is a time of change for academic business librarians. Traditional jobs in U.S. business libraries are radically being altered or disappearing. Anyone scanning job announcements can see that library job descriptions have changed and now incorporate the new developments in technology, collection development, and an emphasis on customer service. From observing changes over the past few years, and in talking with the librarians in Copenhagen, and elsewhere, it is quite obvious that librarians are stepping out of the role of information gopher, and concentrating on assessing the value of information resources, organizing and creating improved access to information, and offering academic clients opportunities to learn information retrieval skills. Just because our libraries are operating outside the walls does not necessarily mean a library without librarians. It is up to us to define and be an advocate for our role in the 21st century.

In 1997, Bill Gates, speaking at the annual conference of the Special Libraries Association in Seattle, indicated that he still believed in a future for librarians. "Librarians understand the value of information in an organization. They're expert knowledge organizers and navigators. Librarians are using technology to provide more rapid and productive research. The role of the librarian as information linker and sharer continues and evolves."

Several years ago, the San Francisco Bay Chapter of SLA hosted a program called "The Future for Librarians: Positioning Yourself for Success." Speakers identified the following as necessary for survival in the field:

- *an interest in being proactive in your organization*

- *the ability to welcome and initiate change*
- *a desire to seek new roles in your organization*

These three qualities, along with The Special Libraries Association's set of professional competencies for librarians, are quite useful in determining how to measure up to the challenges facing academic business information professionals.

First and foremost, librarians must understand their own organization—its mission, future, problems, etc. The need to be versatile, flexible, creative, innovative, techno-savvy, and people oriented is a must. Teamwork, and the development of partnerships with other professionals, is critical to success in many business schools. Planned change has to be viewed as exciting and librarians must be willing to participate in the process.

Business students are different than they were 8-10 years ago. They are computer sophisticated, more aware of information, have global interests, and some are older and experienced in the business world. They expect business school courses to be taught using the latest in instructional technology and admire professors who effectively use it in class. Librarians also need to have the same skills to do effective library instruction in the classroom.

The traditional job of selecting and acquiring print resources has expanded to include evaluating electronic information products (checking for overlaps, scope, updates, quality of indexing and abstracting, etc.) and communicating with sales representatives from content providers. No longer are products simply purchased; the right deal has to be struck and favorable license agreements negotiated. Book selection has also changed in some libraries as dependence on book vendors to do collection development through approval plans becomes more common, the librarian's only involvement being the fine-tuning of the profile.

As professions evolve, so do job titles. In corporate librarianship, many professionals no longer have the title librarian, but have moved to titles such as knowledge manager, strategy advisor, information ecologist, etc. Will new job titles also be in the cards for the academic business librarian?



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Trends in U.S.  
Academic Business Libraries

Yes, the world of business librarianship is changing at Berkeley, Copenhagen, Milan, and around the world. As we prepare to enter the next millennium, I believe that business librarians are prepared to identify and follow the trends needed to keep our profession at the forefront of delivering information and services to our academic clientele.

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