



**Association of College and Research Libraries
Summit on Technology and Change
in Academic Libraries**

Background on the summit

On November 2 and 3, 2006, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) convened an invitational summit focusing on how technologies, on the one hand, and the changing climate for teaching, learning, and scholarship, on the other, will likely recast the roles, responsibilities, and resources of academic libraries over the next decade. The questions the summit was expected to address include:

- To what extent, and in what ways, are academic libraries likely to change?
- What new roles will librarians come to have in the changing information environment?
- What aspects of the academic library will prove the most resistant or impervious to change?
- Will technology finally spur a recasting of how colleges and universities produce and disseminate knowledge? If such a merging of interests takes place, what impact will that have on academic libraries? Or conversely, if there is not a merging of these two agendas, will academic libraries be caught in the middle of an increasingly difficult competition for institutional resources?
- Can ACRL develop a reliable road map for assisting academic libraries and institutions in traversing this changing landscape? Or, will ACRL necessarily have to concentrate on developing reactive strategies and tactics, since no one will be able to see far enough ahead to do otherwise?

The summit, convened during an evening and a day, was conducted as an unscripted roundtable facilitated by Robert Zemsky of The Learning Alliance. Attended by 30 leaders who both care about academic libraries and have the ability to look over the horizon in order to imagine an alternative future, the summit included librarians, presidents and provosts, association representatives, and technology innovators and vendors. The time together resulted in a discussion paper that asks key questions and suggests a few answers that should expand the national discussion of how academic libraries can best serve their institutions and the larger nation. The full essay and an expansion of that conversation are at <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlissues/futureofacademiclibrariesandhighereducation/changingroles.htm> Comments about the essay can be posted at <http://acrlblog.org/2007/03/15/acrl-summit-report-on-changing-role-of-academic-libraries-now-available/>

Highlights from the essay

Three essential activities

There are three essential actions libraries must take to achieve the necessary transformation and remain vital forces on campus in the years ahead:

- First, libraries must evolve from institutions perceived primarily as the domain of the book to institutions that users clearly perceive as providing pathways to high-quality information in a variety of media and information sources.
- Second, the culture of libraries and their staff must proceed beyond a mindset primarily of ownership and control to one that seeks to provide service and guidance in more useful ways, helping users find and use information that may be available through a range of providers, including libraries themselves, in electronic format.

- Third, libraries must assert their evolving roles in more active ways, both in the context of their institutions and in the increasingly competitive markets for information dissemination and retrieval. Libraries must descend from what many have regarded as an increasingly isolated perch of presumed privilege and enter the contentious race to advance in the market for information services – what one participant in our roundtable termed “taking it to the streets.”

A Reconfigured Portfolio

The road to indispensability is not without obstacles, but the summit participants believe it is one that academic and research libraries can readily travel. To remain indispensable, libraries and librarians must come to define and fulfill a reconfigured set of roles for serving their institutions. To be sure, some elements of the future have the familiar cast of tradition as libraries continue to support the core research and educational purposes of the academy. To act on these core purposes in today’s environment, however, requires that libraries move beyond parameters of earlier times to pursue new modes of serving their institutions with a portfolio to:

- Broaden the catalog of resources libraries provide in support of academic inquiry and discovery.
- Foster the creation of new academic communities on campus.
- Support and manage the institution’s intellectual capital.
- Become more assertive in helping their institutions define strategic purposes.

Roles for ACRL

Summit participants suggested a number of roles for ACRL:

- Convene and facilitate dialogues with leaders of key constituencies to consider the future of libraries in supporting the missions of higher education institutions.
- Contribute to national efforts to better understand elements of successful learning, and help advance higher education’s performance in the achievement of learning outcomes.
- Identify and monitor indices of change in the environment of libraries and information dissemination, as well as metrics to gauge the effectiveness of libraries in serving changing needs of their institutions.
- Provide leadership in helping libraries and librarians make effective use of technology in supporting research and education.
- Provide national leadership in communicating the potential and performance of libraries in adopting new paradigms and meeting changing demands of institutions, faculty, and students.

About ACRL

ACRL is a division of the American Library Association (ALA), representing more than 13,000 academic and research librarians and interested individuals. ACRL is the only individual membership organization in North America that develops programs, products and services to meet the unique needs of academic and research librarians. Its initiatives enable the higher education community to understand the role that academic libraries play in the teaching, learning and research environments.

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