Academic Libraries in Transition
– Challenges Ahead

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Outline of Presentation

Introduction

Challenges facing academic libraries

Potential of knowledge management

Role of education providers

Developments in the Division of Information Studies

Conclusions
Introduction

Evolving information and KBE has impacted all organisations and every form of businesses including academic libraries.

Opportunities for forward facing academic libraries to exploit this opportunity to rethink their activities, reinvent or reposition themselves
Challenges facing academic libraries (1)

A hotly addressed issue (e.g. IFLA workshop, ARL and ACRL workshops, standards, position papers, activities, etc.)

Vision and mission of academic libraries are changing –
• key role of providing ‘competitive advantage’ for the parent university,
• learning and research centres
• Learning building, and so on
Challenges facing academic libraries (2)

Rich body of literature attests to how well academic libraries and educators are identifying and proposing innovative solutions for tackling the many challenges facing academic libraries.

A few of these challenges are elaborated in this presentation suing the framework of ACRL’s Standards for college libraries 2000 edition .....
Challenges facing academic libraries

(1) Services and Access

Need to exploit all forms to digital and telecomm technologies to create and provide new forms of collections, services and access to library materials.

Examples:

24-hour electronic Web-based library with reference, reserve, circulation functions at different levels of sophistication.
Challenges facing academic libraries

Digital reference services using email, Web forms and video conferencing

Online document delivery service requests with credit card payments.

Single password logons to provide one stop access point for different types of library resources.

Push technology to disseminate information to users.
Challenges facing academic libraries

(2) Instructions and Research

Information literacy (IL) skills and knowledge is a hallmark of information professionals. IL is even more important now with the existence of the Web. More guidance to users is needed to help them select, evaluate and use information (and to avoid reliance on convenient information on the Web).

Academic librarians remain important allied professionals in supporting totality of university education.
Challenges facing academic libraries

Many new research issues and challenges have emerged.

Need for academic librarians to establish sound theoretical foundations for its practices, services and programs to set a solid base to “invent its future”

Proactive research actions will enhance and improve the credibility, status and value of academic librarians against a backdrop of policy makers who are calling the demise of the physical library.
Challenges facing academic libraries

(3) Resources and Collection Development

New initiatives in the form of digital libraries and information portals have surfaced.

Application of “user-centred” paradigm to create customisable interfaces to better meet the needs of individual users.

Development of current awareness services with links to rich sources of internal (Intranet) and external (Internet) information.
Challenges facing academic libraries

Higher future bandwidth and new multimedia objects availability will yield new highly sophisticated interactive systems conceived, maintained for content by academic librarians.

Collection management remains a challenge to optimally develop a collection to meet a new generation of Internet-savvy users.

Licensing, copyright and fair use are remaining issues to be resolved.
Challenges facing academic libraries

(4) Administration and Cooperation

4 key components of an information organisation

- Data/Information
- People
- Information-Intensive Organisation
- Hardware
- Software
Challenges facing academic libraries

New organisational structures are formed (e.g. merger of academic library and computer centre)

Need to address challenges of organisation culture and change, and synergy to provide new offerings in products and services.

Need for sound administration and HR policies to shape HR and expectations of future organisation.
Challenges facing academic libraries

Challenge to provide high levels of services to meet newer and higher expectations of users but at reduced costs.

Examples of solutions:

Consortia, ECA funding for research, tough negotiations for best price, rebuilding collection, outsourcing, redirecting/reallocating funds, inter-library cooperation at different levels
Challenges facing academic libraries

(5) Staff and Training

Human asset will remain the library’s greatest asset.

Collective knowledge of staff is key and steps are needed to help develop staff to their fullest potential.

Proficiency in LIS and information skills need to be complemented with new hardware and software skills to operate in an IT-intensive environment.
Challenges facing academic libraries

Academic librarians are knowledge workers. They need to constantly update/acquire new skills and knowledge to remain relevant and drive the organisation forward.

Academic library’s close affiliation to University’s library school provides prime opportunity for librarians to be part of teaching faculty and active research groups, as well as an avenue for attending seminars, short courses, auditing advanced courses in library school’s curricula.
Potential of knowledge management

Academic librarians are very close to the heart of knowledge management (KM) as a result of their intimate association to information and knowledge.

They need to respond quickly to take advantage of this new wave of KM revolution.

Librarians already possess many skills of KM by virtue of their training and nature of work!
Potential of knowledge management

Need to transform themselves into knowledge managers by transforming the information management skills and enhance their KM competencies.

Academic libraries are in excellent position to exploit KM since the University is the business of creating and using knowledge so that they can create new opportunities beyond their traditional roles.
Potential of knowledge management

To do so, there is a need to restructure their functions, expand the roles and responsibilities, introduce new services and products, build strategic alliances …

Such initiatives can be built upon already-existing expertise in library and information services professionals.

Need a little orientation to see the picture….
Potential of knowledge management

1. Knowledge in classification schemes/controlled vocabulary

Building knowledge taxonomies and ontology development (for organising knowledge resources on intranets, web sites, portals)
Potential of knowledge management

2. Knowledge/experience in cataloguing

Great foundation for metadata creation thereby enabling much richer document descriptions
Potential of knowledge management

3. Knowledge in resource selection/collection development

Content creation and management in enterprise knowledge portals
Potential of knowledge management

4. Building and searching online databases

Building and searching knowledge bases and repositories to manage organisational memory
Potential of knowledge management (8)

Knowledge in conducting studies related to information needs and information seeking behaviour

Customer management, customer-relationship management
Potential of knowledge management

Citation analysis, extraction of management information from library automated systems

Business and competitive intelligence

Opportunities abound – it is important to seize it and take positive actions. Delay in actions is accompanied by danger of becoming redundant!
Role of Education Providers

Plays an important role to prepare academic libraries take advantage of KM to meet challenges.

LIS schools have been quick to respond to KM and reoriented their curricula and teaching focus.

Graduates have new competencies to play key roles in organisations. An elevation in status and recognition is expected over time.
Role of Education Providers

To stay relevant, academic libraries should build strategic alliances with LIS schools and actively participate in academic programmes and professional development activities.

Continuous organisational learning and ability to apply them in all aspects of library work becomes a critical success factor in future.
Developments in Div of Info Studies (1)

Started in 1993 and offered MSc (Info Studies).

Adopted a proactive approach to provide current and relevant experience to graduate students.

Undergone 4 major curriculum revisions since 1993, the last been March 2002.

Significance changes made in the latest curriculum revision to meet demands and expectations of a rapidly changing information and knowledge driven industry.
Developments in Div of Info Studies \(^{(2)}\)

New courses in areas of managing people, knowledge organisation, marketing, client-centred services, performance measures in the digital environment.

Existing courses were reviewed and revised, with further integration of technology and its application into its courses.

Courses related to Web-based systems were expanded. Enterprise information and knowledge portals were emphasised.
Developments in Div of Info Studies

MSc (Info Studies) programme offers 5 areas of concentration:

1. Library and information studies
2. Information management
3. School media resource management
4. Archival informatics
5. Information systems
Developments in Div of Info Studies

Potential of KM realised by Division as early as 1998.


In 2002, the KM specialisation was developed into a full fledged MSc in KM programme.
MSc (Knowledge Management) (1)

Interdisciplinary programme that draws upon the disciplines of management, information, communication and technology.

To develop skill sets and knowledge in areas of information management and organisation, information technology, organisational communication, information policies, KM tools and techniques, and working knowledge in the electronic environment.
MSc (Knowledge Management)  

Special efforts were made to align programme to meet KM requirements by realigning traditional IM subjects to develop KM competencies.

Programme to be taught by academicians of different backgrounds, industry partners, and KM practitioners.

Formed strategic alliances and partnerships with different constituents to run programme.
MSc (Knowledge Management) (3)

MSc(IS) graduates can enroll in MSc(KM) degree.

Can also opt for continuing education by auditing elective modules.

Current students in MSc(IS) and MSc(KM) can select up to 2 subjects across curricula to obtain a wider range of information skills/competencies.
Conclusions

Academic librarians are faced with a stimulating and exciting journey ahead.

Need to reinvent themselves, embark upon continuous learning, take on new and expanded roles.

Knowledge sharing, positive attitude, strong sense of service, expertise in both paper and electronic environment, a market-facing mindset, and forming partnerships with LIS schools are important considerations for success in future!