The Role of the UBC Library in Scholarly Research

Discussion Paper

Prepared by the Working Group on the Role of the Library in Scholarly Research

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Part I: Background

UBC Library has been a central and important source of support for the UBC research community and will continue, at least in the foreseeable future, in this important role. In *Trek 2010,* one of the stated strategies to meet the goal of supporting "the development of outstanding research in all disciplines" is to "[e]nsure that the Library provides appropriate support to enable UBC researchers to achieve excellence in all areas of their research"(2005). The collections and services of the Library are key to this supportive role.

What may be a more considered question is whether the Library has the imperative to pursue research in its own right (Neal, 2006). As Neal points out, "Librarianship is an 'information poor' information profession. Decisions are routinely not supported by the evidence of well-designed investigations" (2006, p. 1). Similarly, "Too much important information produced in libraries and by librarians never gets shared or applied beyond the local level, in spite of expanding outlets for communication" (Neal, 2006, p. 2). This scenario is all too familiar at UBC Library.

In this paper we have chosen to broaden our focus on the role of the UBC Library to be a more active participant in research, and for the purposes of discussion we have delineated three separate but overlapping roles:

1. A consulting, supportive role – working with researchers
2. A collaborative role – working as part of a research team (interdisciplinary)
3. A scholarly professional role – working on library-focused research

There are many areas in which the library can lead and/or participate in research. To the question, "Should the library become a more active participant in research?" we suggest that yes we should for the following reasons:

- In some libraries, traditional services are declining and we can explore other roles in which the library can either take a lead or add value.

- We discovered in our investigation that UBC librarians, in some part, are already doing this work but are not recognized for it.

- We may be carrying out research-worthy types of inquiry but we need to evaluate it and to disseminate results that could add to the existing knowledge base and inform others.

- With our expertise we can be leaders in many areas of information science and information literacy, e.g. learning objects, use of technology, knowledge management, teaching and learning, etc.

Technology

Technological changes that are impacting the organization of information, collections, and information retrieval have enormous potential as areas of study. Research in these areas would inform UBC Library as well as the larger academic community.

Technology has opened up opportunities to research such areas as:

> innovation in the design of space, the transition from analog to electronic collections, new technology-based and customized services, sophisticated and open access to information, preservation and archiving of resources, new models of scholarly publishing, support for electronic pedagogy, staff recruitment and development, entrepreneurial resource development, and digital collection development, for example. (Neal, 2006)

Many of these areas have potential for collaboration in interdisciplinary research teams and inter-library national and/or international collaborations.

In his D-Lib Magazine report on the Fourth eLibrary Symposium at UBC, Iverson stated that the symposium "explored future directions toward making the university research library an active participant in a research program to deliver new, collaborative services and study the impact of those services on a diverse, learning and research-oriented university community" (2002). He further suggests that "a research library must consider collaboration and community services as part of an evolving family of services" (Iverson, 2002).

Information Literacy

Changes in information access and usage, information literacy and pedagogical practices offer exciting possibilities for libraries.

Information literacy is increasingly important in this era of rapidly growing information and information access. Bruce (2001) suggests that, "[l]ibrarians are beginning to recognise the need to move away from a library and information retrieval centred view of information literacy toward a broader understanding of the role of information literacy, and the role of the information professional in fostering student learning" (p. 108). This approach opens up exciting research possibilities for librarians to study learning behaviours, test new ideas and instructional methods, and publish their findings in the pedagogical and library literature.

In fact, there are many areas in which research libraries are (or should be) shifting focus. Lougee (2002) points to shifts in emphasis of traditional roles - from emphasizing the value of collections to emphasizing the value of expertise; from information description to information analysis; from support roles to collaborative roles; and from facility-based to campus-wide enterprise.

Scholarly Activity

Not only are traditional librarian roles shifting, the notion of scholarship itself is being redefined.

In *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Boyer, 1997), Ernest Boyer suggests defining scholarship more broadly into four overlapping linked categories:

1. the scholarship of discovery/inquiry
2. the scholarship of integration
3. the scholarship of application
4. the scholarship of teaching

Building on Boyer's idea, there has been some movement in academia to broaden the range of activities recognized as scholarly for the purposes of tenure, promotion, or merit (Association of College and Research Libraries Task Force on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards, 1998).

As evidence, the *Guide to Promotion and Tenure Procedures at UBC* states:

> 5.1.1 Under the Agreement's provisions on "Scholarly Activity", creative or professional work of distinction ranks equally with scholarly research. (The University of British Columbia. Senior Appointments Committee and the Committee of Deans, 2006)

> 6.1.1 Under Article 4.03 of the Agreement and the definition of "Scholarly Activity", scholarship of teaching ranks equally with scholarly research. (The University of British Columbia. Senior Appointments Committee and the Committee of Deans, 2006)

The ACRL Task Force on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards reframed the activities of academic librarians to fit into this broader consideration of what constitutes academic work (1998). St. Clair and Miller (2000) presented the following examples of library research topics within the framework of Boyer's four categories of scholarship.

> *Inquiry:* research on the organization of information; user information needs; library contributions to learning; preservation and access issues; and navigating cyberspace.

> *Integration:* investigations into the application of learning theory to instructional activities; employing communications theory in the study of reference work; and applying administrative and management techniques to library services.

Application: articles on best practices for benchmarking in production areas, such as shelving; or, library initiatives that did not go well

Teaching: developing, testing and improving pedagogical techniques to meet the library's role in teaching people to be independent scholars; exploring the effectiveness of online tutorials; best practices in Web design; and student learning styles related to a variety of techniques.

For the purposes of this discussion paper we have extended the scope of scholarly research to include scholarly activities.

Part II: Scholarly Activities of UBC Librarians

There is much happening in the UBC Library. UBC librarians were asked by our working group to send examples of scholarly research or activities which they had carried out or participated in. The following list groups activities according to the three categories outlined above: consulting, supportive role -- working with researchers; collaborative role -- working as part of a research team (interdisciplinary); and library-focused research role (basic and practice-based). As many of the examples provided blurred the line between collaborative, interdisciplinary research/activities and library-focused research, we have collapsed these two categories for this part of the discussion.

Consulting or supportive role:

- Providing reference support for researchers

- Organizing important resources used by researchers

- Preserving important collections

- Liaising with partners (public and private) on planning research initiatives

- Participating in scholarly publishing activities (e.g., open access publishing of journals, conference proceedings)

- Becoming members of open access publishing committees or database vendor committees

- Planning institutional repositories

- Supporting online thesis submission

- Digitizing materials (e.g., Japanese maps of the Tokugawa Era)

- Creating databases or finding aids for resources on specific topics

- Providing metadata expertise (e.g., arranging archival fonds, indexing)

- Producing web guides as primary or secondary research resources

- Creating faculty publication lists and databases (e.g., managing contributions to ssrn.com)
- Pursuing interlibrary loan projects and publications
- Creating learning objects
- Researching new or emerging technologies (e.g., PDA's, Internet Messaging, blogging, podcasting, wikis, online discussion groups)

Collaborative with non-librarian scholars or library-focused research

- Presenting at conferences, seminars
- Publishing in scholarly journals
- Submitting library proposals for projects (e.g., RefWorks, Institutional Archives)
- Undertaking primary research during sabbaticals or study leaves
- Collaborating with other scholars in primary research projects
- Pursuing doctoral studies
- Contributing chapters to published books
- Editing journals and peer-reviewing articles
- Collaborating with other scholars (faculty, researchers, fellows) on grant or project proposals or pure research
- Collaborating with other scholars on books, articles, conference presentations
- Participating in international projects to link with scholars in other countries
- Developing, independently or in collaboration, surveys, survey questions and research strategies
- Managing or overseeing grant- or endowment-funded projects
- Creating original work in websites and collections (e.g., the British Columbia Sheet Music Project)
- Creating bibliographies
- Creating learning objects
- Teaching activities; applied research and testing of pedagogical techniques

Part III: Constraints/Challenges

There is no lack of content to pursue in any of the areas of scholarly activities discussed. However, we have identified several constraints and challenges to pursuing scholarly activities within the UBC Library context.

St. Clair and Miller (2000) outline several reasons for low research output by librarians, including the lack of rewards, lack of release time, lack of funding, and the fact that librarians "are seldom socialized to the research process in general" (p. 66). Several organizational factors described by Christiansen, et al. (2004) make undertaking scholarly activities difficult for librarians. For example, teaching and research faculty have more flexibility in terms of their schedules and their place(s) of work. There is also a difference in the organizational subcultures of librarians and faculty. This is currently the case at the UBC Library.

1. Lack of time

   Lack of time is a significant barrier. 'Regular' job responsibilities make it very difficult to take the next step of transforming the work done in all areas including collection development, reference, teaching, public services or technical services into scholarly activities. In order to pursue these next steps librarians may pursue these activities on their own time. In several responses to our survey, respondents cited lack of support within the Library for pursuing scholarly research on 'library time.'

   Question: How can research/scholarly activities be integrated into the job of librarians?

2. Lack of infrastructure

   If indeed librarians are not often socialized to the research process, there is a need to learn the scholarly framework. We need a process, training and support on how to proceed. For example, getting grants – what is the process, who needs to be involved? How will it be administered? A process is needed so that obtaining grants can be pursued in a systematic and organized way. What are potential funding sources? Training on grant writing, ethics approval process, hiring contract research assistants, and managing grant funds are examples of the type of support needed. Support in research design would also be helpful.

   Question: Can a research infrastructure be incorporated into the UBC Library? Is there a perceived need? Is there interest and commitment on the part of UBC librarians to further this effort?

3. Missed opportunities for collaboration

There is a graduate School of Library, Archival and Information Studies (SLAIS) at UBC and yet there is little to no collaboration with its faculty members in the area of research. This is a missed opportunity for both organizations.

Question: How can we increase our collaboration with SLAIS?

4. Lack of rewards

Finally, even with time, support, and collaboration, research endeavors need to be recognized and rewarded by one's organization to flourish.

Question: What rewards should be considered for scholarly activities?

5. One size does NOT fit all

We wish to emphasize this point as not all librarians are at the same place, or even necessarily on the same career trajectory. Boyer (1997) discusses how personal and professional changes that occur over the course of a career require flexibility in career paths. The ACRL Task Force on Institutional Priorities and Faculty Rewards notes that "[p]erformance criteria and reward structures should enable librarians to contribute in the ways that best utilize their individual talents, which should in turn assure that the overall goals of the library are achieved" (1998).

Question: How should we encourage pursuit of an individual's strengths in work whether it be teaching, research, reference, planning, etc.?

Part IV: Opportunities for fostering research at the UBC Library

In spite of the constraints there have been a number of librarians participating in scholarly activities. There are many opportunities to celebrate and to expand on what is currently happening in the UBC Library in terms of scholarly activities. As well, there are many new areas of enquiry to explore.

1. Set up infrastructure. For example, a research office or division, a research committee, etc. – some recognized entity to manage and coordinate the process in the UBC Library. There needs to be oversight and development of process, policies, training, administration, etc. Some of the following suggestions could be coordinated by this entity.

2. Explore ways in which the work currently being done in the UBC Library can be disseminated, i.e. what avenues of dissemination can be encouraged and supported by the UBC Library? For example, the research entity could prepare and publish on the Intranet a bibliography of peer-reviewed library studies journals. The research entity could assume responsibility for sending updates on current articles of interest to

academic libraries. UBC librarians could be encouraged to use their professional development funds to support research endeavors.

3. Explore the demand for research consultancy services. This might be a fee-based consulting service run by the library to work with researchers in an in-depth manner. This would enable librarians to be involved in scholarly research work at a deeper than usual level. Other universities offer this kind of service.

4. Identify major funding resources for library research. As part of infrastructure to support scholarly activities in the library, there should be an exploration of the research funding opportunities and these opportunities should be publicized. The research entity could publish the timetable for important grant and award applications, and send reminders to those who are interested.

5. Develop strategies for the recognition of scholarly achievements. For example, publications by UBC Library staff could be celebrated in various Library and UBC-wide publications.

6. Develop a research program.

    Ashcroft and McIvor (2000) describe the changing landscape of library research funding in the UK and give examples of how funding affects the research program. One of the examples given is a strategy outlining eight major research programs:

    - Digital libraries
    - Information retrieval
    - Library co-operation
    - Management of libraries and information services
    - Preservation of and access to the recorded heritage
    - Providers and users of information
    - Public libraries
    - Value and Impact

    If UBC Library is to foster research by its staff members, it needs to develop a research program. With proper support and clear goals, it could be on the leading edge in some areas, e.g. institutional archives, open access publishing, information literacy education, preservation in the electronic environment (The University of British Columbia. Advisory Committee on Information Technology. Subcommittee on Policy).

7. Encourage collaboration with other researchers.

    The growing role of librarians in teaching provides more exposure to potential research projects. Librarians' involvement in unique special collections such as the Prang collection in University of Maryland or the Swann collection at UBC bring intellectual stimulation and interest that may spark research projects.

Joint appointments as librarians and faculty members are becoming more common in Asian studies in US and Europe. Research taken on by these librarians exemplifies how and why librarians engage in research.

8. Develop closer relationships with other faculties and institutions.

   SLAIS has been mentioned and there should be many opportunities for SLAIS faculty and UBC librarians to partner in research and increase the involvement of the UBC Library in working with SLAIS students offering co-op opportunities and supervising direct studies.

9. Find ways to provide release time for scholarly activities in addition to sabbaticals. How could the librarian's role shift from service to scholarly activities as needed? We need to discuss innovative options, buy-out time through grant funds, mini-sabbaticals, flexible working hours during non-peak times, designated research times, etc.

Part V: Further Discussion

It remains indisputable for the time being that the UBC Library plays a crucial role in supporting scholarly research throughout the university. With the technological advancements which have increased information availability and access, along with opportunities for engagement and integration, librarians are poised at a critical moment to either jump on the waves of change as a passive rider, or to step up to the fore and take the reigns of change and help guide it towards the betterment of our community and our profession. If it is the latter, then the UBC Library will need to become a more active participant and initiator in scholarly research and activities. If we are to pursue this course, then there are a number of challenges and constraints we must confront and create concrete solutions to in order to forge ahead with any success. From this pursuit, however, many new opportunities will emerge, ones which may even lead to the increased viability and visibility of the Library.

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