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“Reinventing the Library” at Eastern Washington University: An Intensive Strategic Planning Experience with Faculty

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In 2006, Eastern Washington University (EWU) implemented a process to develop college- and department-level goals and outcomes in alignment with the university’s strategic plan. The university’s Board of Trustees had endorsed A Commitment to Action, a report from the Office of Academic Affairs and the EWU Faculty Organization. The report identified three strategic goals for the learning environment:

- a rigorous and engaged learning environment;
- an academic community culture that supports and engages faculty and staff throughout their careers; and
- an institution-wide commitment to community engagement that benefits the university, the region, and the world (Eastern Washington University 2006, pp. 1–2).

As library administrators reviewed the library’s previous planning document, which had been drafted in 1998 as a seven-year plan, they discussed revitalizing the vision and mission for EWU Libraries.

Like many academic libraries, EWU Libraries had been struggling to remain relevant to students and faculty in an environment saturated with competing sources of information. Library gate count and reference interactions were declining, even as reference and instruction librarians perceived greater need among students to develop information literacy skills. Best practices for strategic planning, especially for academic libraries, include key stakeholders in the planning process (Brown & Gonzalez, 2007). Library administration recognized EWU faculty were key stakeholders in realigning the library’s mission with the learning needs of its constituents.

In spring of 2006, EWU Libraries received funding through an institutional strategic planning grant to hold a two-week institute for faculty representing the six colleges at EWU. Participants would develop a vision for the future of the library at EWU. The grant provided funds for faculty stipends equivalent to teaching a summer course as incentive for faculty participation. In addition to their attendance during the two-week institute, participants were to complete two tasks:

- to draft a vision statement describing the library’s future role within the context of the university’s mission as a regional comprehensive institution, and
- to work with faculty colleagues and administrators during the subsequent year to develop consensus support for the vision statement.

“REINVENTING THE LIBRARY”: PLANNING THE INSTITUTE

Dean of Libraries Patricia Kelley planned the institute in consultation with the library faculty chair, the associate dean of libraries, and other members of the library organization. The first step was to identify the institute participants. The grant provided funding for stipends for two faculty members from each college. Dean Kelley asked each college dean to recommend two faculty participants who valued library services, who had potential to influence other faculty members in their college, and who would be available to participate during the summer. With the assistance of the college deans, the library identified eleven faculty participants from the six colleges, four of whom were department chairs. Library participants included the dean, the library faculty chair, the library faculty member who served as library instruction coordinator, and the associate dean. Dean Kelley asked other library faculty and staff to be presenters or guests during discussions of specific topics. Based upon the summer schedules of the participants, the institute was scheduled for July 24 through August 4, 2006, 9 AM to 4 PM each weekday. The library supplemented the grant funding to provide lunch and refreshments to participants.

In planning the location of the institute, the library administration saw clear benefits for meeting in the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library on the Cheney campus of EWU. As the main library for EWU,

Kennedy Library is a beautiful, modern facility, with space and resources appropriate for the institute. The dean's office was located in Kennedy Library, allowing for staff support in providing information or materials as needed. Faculty who had not been in the library recently would have an opportunity to see changes in resources and services. The Kennedy Library's instruction room was selected as the location for the institute. The furniture in the room could be arranged to meet the needs of the group, and the instruction room had the technology to facilitate presentations.

Dean Kelley planned the institute as a seminar using a combination of readings, presentations, activities, and large- and small-group discussions. The curriculum for the first week of the institute was weighted heavily on presentations to inform participants about current national and local trends affecting academic libraries. The schedule included time for large group discussion at the end of each afternoon to reflect upon the day. The curriculum for the second week included some presentations but allowed more time for small-group activities and discussion as the group grew closer to articulating a vision. Guest speakers were invited to present on the following topics: overview of usage trends at the EWU Libraries, characteristics of "NetGen" students, information literacy, general education at EWU, trends in library collections, emerging technologies in academic libraries, and faculty development opportunities. Prior to the institute, Dean Kelley asked participants to read an article about the forces changing academic libraries (Campbell, 2006) and to review selected results from the LibQual+ survey of satisfaction (2004) with library services given to EWU students and faculty in 2004.

“REINVENTING THE LIBRARY”: AN INTENSIVE STRATEGIC PLANNING EXPERIENCE

Week 1

The first day of "Reinventing the Library" focused on providing the context for the institute. Following introductions, Dean Kelley led a discussion of the changing role of academic libraries. She emphasized the importance of imagining the future role of the library at EWU. At lunch, which was served by administrative staff each day in the library instruction room, faculty had the opportunity to chat with each other. The afternoon included a Power-Point presentation showing current operational trends at EWU Libraries. The presentation provided local evidence of several of the trends discussed in the background readings, leading to discussion of the information needs and research abilities of EWU students. By the end of the first day, faculty were interested and engaged in sharing their ideas about the library with each other. The second day focused on undergraduate education and information literacy. To prepare for the discussions, participants were asked to read an article about the impact of the Internet on undergraduate research (Bruckman, 2005) and another on first-year students and the library (Barefoot, 2006). The session began with a panel of four undergraduate students, majoring in education, graphic arts, pre-medicine, and dental hygiene, who spoke about their research habits. This presentation was one of the highlights of "Reinventing the Library" because of the rich discussion it evoked. The students spoke candidly about their use of Google and other Web resources to complete class assignments. The pre-medicine student, who was also an international student, used the library and a broader scope of its resources more frequently than did her American peers. The students described a disconnect between library assignments in the basic composition and rhetoric courses and the research assignments in upper-division courses in their major. In the afternoon, the library instruction coordinator led a discussion of information literacy and faculty expectations for undergraduate research skills. Participants discussed the need to build research competencies into the curriculum systematically to insure that all students develop research skills as they progress through their degree programs. The guest speaker on Wednesday, July 26, was the university's faculty fellow for general education, who also chaired the EWU General Education Reform Group. The presentation included an overview of general education at EWU and a more in-depth discussion of recommendations for general education reform. These recommendations were based on six key learning outcomes, all of which related directly to information literacy:

- critical thinking and intellectual curiosity;

- communication;
- diverse perspectives;
- internationalization and globalization;
- social, environmental, and ethical responsibility; and
- disciplinary expertise.

The institute participants discussed the relationship between the proposed general education reform, information literacy, and the library of the future.

By day four of the institute, participants had received and discussed a great deal of information about academic libraries. The topic shifted to the research needs of upper-division students, graduate students, and faculty. The associate dean of libraries facilitated two activities to generate ideas and discussion related to faculty expectations for library resources and services. In the first activity, participants created an affinity diagram that described current faculty use of library resources and services. Each participant recorded the ways in which they currently used the library, recording one resource or service per sticky note. Participants posted the notes on the wall and grouped related notes together. The group then analyzed the findings and concluded that faculty currently used the library in traditional ways (e.g., as a place for independent study and quiet reflection, for interlibrary loan services, etc.).

In the second activity on day four, each participant envisioned the EWU Libraries of the future by creating a “future map.” They were asked to describe future library services, resources, staff, means of communication, technologies, and environment that would best support and engage faculty. This exercise encouraged the participants to think creatively and concretely. The group identified themes for the future of the library, including access to more resources that facilitate independent research, the use of technology to enhance communication, and a physical and virtual library environment that brings people together.

The primary topic of discussion on the fifth day was library collections. EWU Libraries’ collection management coordinator explained trends in the collection allocations budget, the allocation formula, and the role and responsibility of department representatives in the selection process. Discussion included the impact of aggregator databases on the allocation budget, inflation costs, and funding trends. Base-budget funding for library resources has not kept pace with increasing subscription costs. One participant described adjusting research assignments to be less rigorous if EWU Libraries did not have the resources students needed to complete them. The group discussed improving the collection development process to be more responsive to the curriculum.

By the end of the first week of “Reinventing the Library,” Dean Kelley was very pleased with the progress of the institute. The group had become cohesive early in the week, and participants were engaged and open in discussions. The guest speakers had provided relevant information. The group identified themes as they emerged. As the week progressed, the focus shifted naturally from understanding the present state of EWU Libraries to envisioning the future. The weekend provided a much-needed break to rest, reflect, and process what we had learned.

Week 2

On Monday morning, Dean Kelley led a review of the previous week. Participants stated the ideas they found most important from the first week. The most critical idea to emerge was that the library must be integrated into the way the faculty teaches. Following this discussion, the large group broke into four small groups, and each group began to articulate ideas about the library’s future role in supporting the university’s mission. One group focused on the complexity of defining the library as place, both physically and virtually. A second group described the library’s identity through a series of statements beginning with the phrase “This library....” Another group developed ideas for repositioning the library as the center of academic life at the university. The fourth group discussed collections and information literacy skills. At the end of the day, each group presented the results of its discussion to the larger group.

Dean Kelley collected the electronic version of each document and e-mailed the documents to all participants for future reference.

Two guest speakers joined the group on Tuesday, August 1. The library's systems librarian demonstrated emerging technologies for academic libraries, including link-resolver and federated searching applications. The groups discussed the challenge of keeping pace with the rapid change in information technologies. The director of the university's Teaching & Learning Center (TLC) spoke about opportunities for collaboration between the library and the TLC to support faculty development. In the afternoon, the participants formed three small groups to draft vision statements for the role of EWU Libraries within the university. Each group presented its draft to the large group. One participant, a faculty member in the technical writing program, volunteered to synthesize the three drafts into one vision statement for discussion the next day.

On Wednesday the group reviewed Vision I, the synthesized draft vision statement. The document identified four definitive characteristics for the library, followed by bulleted lists of outcomes related to each characteristic. Through large group discussion, the four characteristics of the libraries were revised as goals and became the core of the document. The outcomes were revised as strategies for achieving the goals. During this discussion, the document was projected on a large screen so that all participants could read and critique revisions as they were written. The revision process was intense, with all members of the institute eager to create a statement that captured the spirit of "Reinventing the Library." During this session, the president of the faculty organization reviewed and commented on the draft vision statement. The resulting document, titled Vision II, fulfilled the purpose of the institute to articulate a vision of the library's future role within the context of EWU's mission. The following statement provides the core of the vision document:

As centers for the development and dissemination of knowledge, EWU Libraries:

- I. foster interactive relationships among faculty, students, and the community in the context of the mission and vision of the EWU as a regional comprehensive university;
- II. serve as the focal point of university intellectual life by supporting students, faculty, administrators, and the community in academic endeavors such as curriculum development, student research, instructional delivery, and development of critical inquiry;
- III. provide special services to support faculty research;
- IV. stimulate a vital campus culture and life (Kelley et al., 2006).

Participants agreed that collaborative relationships, centrality to the intellectual life of the institution, instructional support and research services, and vitality of purpose were key elements for the future of the library.

A small group worked on further refining the vision document on Thursday, August 3. The other members of "Reinventing the Library" formed two groups: one to identify stakeholders and next steps for institutional endorsement of the vision and another to brainstorm activities to move the library toward achieving the vision. On August 4, the last morning of "Reinventing the Library," each group presented the results of the previous day's work sessions. All versions of the draft statement and electronic files from the work sessions were saved onto one computer so the library had a complete record of the institute. Dean Kelley thanked the participants and gave each a parting gift, including a certificate of achievement and a mug with a picture of Kennedy Library.

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

In the year following "Reinventing the Library," the participants worked to build consensus for the vision statement within the university community. In Fall Quarter 2006, Dean Kelley attended college and department meetings to discuss the vision from "Reinventing the Library," along with the faculty members from that college who had participated in the institute. The Deans' Council, an advisory committee chaired by the provost, endorsed the vision statement. The Library Affairs Council (LAC), a

committee of the faculty organization, held a joint meeting with the participants from “Reinventing the Library” to discuss the vision and its implications. Some LAC members felt they could not endorse the vision statement without a clearer understanding of its budgetary implications. Others felt that, as a strategic planning tool, the vision statement provided guidance without prescribing specific actions, such as reallocation of funds. In Spring Quarter 2007, the LAC recommended that the faculty organization endorse the ideas presented in the vision statement. In its last meeting of the academic year, the faculty organization endorsed the statement.

During the 2006–2007 academic year, EWU Libraries engaged in a strategic planning process to develop strategic goals through 2012 in alignment with the university’s strategic plan. Library faculty and staff who participated in “Reinventing the Library” incorporated the vision statement into this process. The vision from “Reinventing the Library” was presented as a topic at Library Vitals, the in-house staff development program, to disseminate and discuss with the broader group of library employees. Some of the faculty members from “Reinventing the Library” also participated in the library’s strategic planning retreat in December 2006, along with student representatives.

Through the planning process, faculty and staff of EWU Libraries developed five goals and related strategies that incorporate key elements of the vision document:

- engage students in critical inquiry;
- provide a virtual and physical environment that encourages intellectual inquiry and stimulates connections between students and faculty;
- contribute to program excellence through integration of information literacy at all levels of the curriculum;
- provide a learning environment that encourages exploration of cultures and perspectives; and
- contribute to program excellence by supporting faculty research.

Once the goals were in place, EWU Libraries implemented initiatives to demonstrate the spirit and impact of “Reinventing the Library.” Thirsty Minds, a coffee shop operated by the university’s food service, opened in the lobby of Kennedy Library in Spring 2007 as a place where faculty and students could connect with each other. The Kennedy Library also purchased furniture, such as “amoeba” tables and chairs on wheels, to support group work and collaboration. EWU Libraries subscribed to Web-based citation software that supports collaborative research. One of the faculty members from “Reinventing the Library” offered to incorporate this software into a service-learning project for her technical writing students. EWU Libraries became the “client” in the project; the technical writing students taught other students to use the citation software. This project was so successful it has been repeated each subsequent quarter. To promote outreach to students, EWU Libraries implemented a student liaison program. The library student liaison has participated in the development of library policies, attended management meetings, organized student events to be held in the library, partnered with student organizations to promote library resources and services, and maintained the library’s social networking sites. EWU Libraries also partnered with Student Affairs to host an information fair for approximately 1,300 new students and their families during five summer orientation sessions.

NEXT STEPS IN “REINVENTING THE LIBRARY”

The importance of integrating information literacy into the EWU curriculum was a critical idea that emerged from “Reinventing the Library.” Since the institute, instruction librarians have focused on outreach to academic departments, and faculty requests for library instruction have increased. In an effort to develop a more systematic approach to developing student research skills, Library Instruction Coordinator Ielleen Miller, received an institutional strategic planning grant to provide incentives for eight to ten faculty members from two departments to revise the research components of existing courses. Faculty members from the biology and history departments (including one participant from “Reinventing the Library”) have agreed to participate. Faculty members from each department will collaborate with their library faculty counterparts to redesign three courses, including a lower division course that supports

majors and non-majors, a course required of all majors, and an advanced course or capstone for the major. Each revised course will incorporate assessment of student research skills. The revised courses will be taught in Winter and Spring Quarters of 2008. If the project is successful, the library will seek additional funding to invite more departments to participate.

EWU departments develop annual action plans to make progress toward strategic goals. The library's action plan for 2007–2008 includes activities supporting the vision of “Reinventing the Library.” Several activities focus on providing opportunities for students, faculty, and community members to connect at the library. The library will collaborate with academic programs to sponsor lectures and other scholarly events, as well as with student organizations to promote the library services. To encourage reading for pleasure, Kennedy Library will lease a collection of bestsellers to be located in the library's coffee shop. Other activities focus on improving access to collections. EWU Libraries will join the Northwest Digital Archive and expand the scope of digitization projects. Access to electronic journal articles will be improved through implementation of link-resolver software, linking search results to full-text articles across database platforms. These examples demonstrate the continuing impact of “Reinventing the Library.”

More than a year after “Reinventing the Library,” we are planning a reunion of institute participants to reconnect as a group, to celebrate accomplishments, and to listen to faculty perceptions of our progress. Even more importantly, we will thank them. The faculty members who spent two weeks of their summer creating a vision for the future of the library have become passionate library advocates—in their classrooms, departments, and colleges.

TIPS FOR REINVENTING YOUR LIBRARY

The following tips contributed to the success of “Reinventing the Library” at EWU Libraries. They may be adapted to planning experiences other than intensive seminars. First, be selective about participants. Seek faculty from across the disciplines who value the library, but who also are open to new ideas about its resources and services.

Next, provide incentives that are meaningful and commensurate with the time commitment expected of participants. In addition to the stipend funded by the strategic planning grant, we provided lunch as well as morning and afternoon snacks. (Dean Kelley even gave everyone a box lunch to take home on the last day of the institute.)

Third, set clear expectations for what you hope to achieve. Strategic planning discussions can become abstract and philosophical. Clear expectations help to keep the conversation grounded and the participants engaged.

Fourth, be flexible. Recognize when the group needs more time on a topic, when it needs to be refocused, or when it needs to take a break. Sometimes the best insights occur when the discussion takes an unanticipated turn from the day's agenda.

Finally, take action after the event. Let participants know how much you valued their contributions (through a note of thanks, a well-timed word to a dean or department chair, or an article in the library newsletter). Make positive, tangible changes based on ideas from the planning session. Even small actions demonstrate the library's appreciation of faculty participation and commitment to faculty support.

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