
ACRL 2009 Strategic Thinking Guide for Academic Librarians in the New Economy

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Introduction

This project was originally conceived as an environmental scan that would generate discussion at the ACRL 14th National Conference in March 2009. In the wake of dramatic economic developments, government action, and a flood of higher education trends reports, we felt that a strategic thinking guide would better complement the current literature. This guide considers three important drivers in the current environment and poses questions to stimulate conversations and action in your libraries and on your campuses. Along the way, we point to the work of higher education associations, private foundations, government agencies, and individual experts for further “assisted reading.”¹

The ACRL 2009 Strategic Thinking Guide examines the current economic and financial turmoil affecting all of higher education. The current situation is so critical that Gordon Gee, president of The Ohio State University, speaking at the American Council on Education annual meeting in February 2009, issued a call for “intentional upheaval at our colleges and universities just when fiscal chaos already places us on the edge.”² Our choice, he said, is between “reinvention or extinction.” Gee urged leaders to resist the temptation “to hunker down, hide out, take refuge in the fox hole, and wait for the storm to pass.” The federal government is leading the way: President Barack Obama’s 2010 budget proposal was immediately hailed for its “blockbuster ideas,” “sweeping changes,” and “bold and breathtaking set of proposals.”³ Over the past decade, notable library leaders have also called upon librarians to embrace systemic change; however, the stakes have never been high enough to make radical reinvention imperative.

Driver #1: The Economy and Higher Education

Clearly, the deep economic downturn is front and center. Many chief academic officers are waiting to see whether their state governments will accept American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding and, if so, what portion will find its way to their colleges and universities. ARRA includes \$54 billion in “state fiscal-stabilization funds” that can be funneled to public colleges to restore budget cuts, prevent layoffs, or modernize facilities.⁴ Specifically, it includes \$200 million for college work-study and \$39.5 billion for “backfilling” of state budget cuts; uses include facilities modernization and \$200 million for computer centers in public libraries and community colleges.⁵ The ALA Washington Office site provides current information on ARRA developments relating to libraries.⁶

Recent fiscal developments affecting higher education include:

- Universities and colleges experienced a 23% loss in endowments in 2008.⁷ This widespread loss affects flexibility and day-to-day operations, especially in states that are still governed by laws that restrict endowment spending.⁸ Endowment losses are affecting even the wealthiest institutions: Harvard College

1. Lorcan Dempsey, “Assisted Thinking and . . . Assisted Reading.” (February 21, 2009). At <http://orweblog.oclc.org/archives/001885.html>.
2. Gordon Gee, Robert H. Atwell Lecture, American Council on Education 91st Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., February 9, 2009.
3. Sam Dillon, “Drilling Down on the Budget: Student Loans,” *New York Times* (February 27, 2009); Kelly Field, “President’s Budget Would End Bank-Based Student Lending and Significantly Expand Pell Grants,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 27, 2009); Doug Lederman, “Obama’s Budget Blockbuster,” *Inside Higher Ed* (February 27, 2009).
4. Eric Kelderman, “Some States Get Stimulus Whether They Need or Want It,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 16, 2009).
5. Doug Lederman, “The Final Stimulus Bill,” *Inside Higher Education*, February 13, 2009.
6. The ALA Washington Office site includes up-to-date information for librarians regarding the implementation of the ARRA, advocacy strategies, funding, and much more at <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/wo/woissues/washfunding/fedfund/arra101.cfm>.
7. *NACUBO Endowment Study 2008*. See: www.nacubo.org and www.commonfund.org.
8. For a list of the 21 states affected by Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act (UPMIFA), see Jack Stripling, “A Tight Leash,” *Inside Higher Ed* (March 3, 2009).

Library (HCL) layoffs are anticipated this spring in the wake of 30% endowment losses. Half of the HCL budget comes from the endowment.

- While independent giving to higher education rose in 2008, giving to higher education has “hit a wall.” It is expected to decline by 1.7% in 2009.⁹ Proposed income tax changes for affluent Americans in 2010 have the potential to further reduce charitable giving.
- Students and their families want and need to economize, and students are becoming increasingly reluctant to take on student loan debt or attend distant schools.¹⁰ They are applying to more schools in search of the best financial aid package.¹¹ Forty-three percent of first-year students reported that financial aid offers were “very important” or “essential” in choosing a school (a 36-year high); 49.4% plan to work while in school.¹² The effects of “reverse transfers” and bargain hunting are likely to be reflected in the fall 2009 enrollment and continuation figures.
- The 2010 federal budget proposal contains a \$2.5 billion “access and completion program” (\$500 million a year for five years) that would give grants to states and other entities for programs designed to increase students’ success in college, with a particular focus on students from low-income and other disadvantaged backgrounds.¹³
- State-funded institutions (including the libraries of these institutions) are facing dramatic budget reductions: 65% of schools took mid-year budget cuts.¹⁴ Virtually all state institutions are facing some combination of hiring, salary, sabbatical, pension, travel freezes, and/or firings. A recent CUPA-HR survey found that delayed hiring and hiring freezes, salary freezes, and, for non-exempt staff, restricted overtime are the most common strategies for controlling staff costs.¹⁵
- In this economic environment it will be difficult to recruit new faculty and retire older faculty. A recent government study estimates that the average age of faculty increased from 47 to 50 between 1988 and 2004. In 2004, the average age of full-time tenured faculty members was 54.¹⁶ With retirement portfolios shrinking, faculty who wish to retire before age 70 may not be able to do so.
- According to the American Association of University Professors, non-tenure-track positions of all types now account for 68% of all faculty appointments in American higher education.¹⁷ The high turnover among contingent faculty members makes it difficult for academic librarians to establish long-term working relationships necessary for curricular collaborations.

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9. Council for Advancement and Support of Education, Fundraising Index 2009. See press release at <http://www.case.org/Content/PressRelease/Display.cfm?CONTENTITEMID=9109>. See also the Council on Aid to Education latest report at http://www.cae.org/content/pro_data_trends.htm (released February 25, 2009).
 10. The Student Debt Alert Web site reports that the number of students who graduate with more than \$25,000 in loan debt has tripled since the early 1990s.
 11. Chronicle Research Services, Research Brief for “Financial Uncertainty and the Admissions Class of Fall 2008.” <http://research.chronicle.com/reports.html>.
 12. “The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2008.” See <http://www.heri.ucla.edu>.
 13. Doug Lederman, “Obama’s Budget Blockbuster,” *Inside Higher Ed* (February 27, 2009).
 14. According to the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), 44 percent of the 65 percent are in states where the governors have proposed cuts or flat funding for FY2010. See “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” *Inside Higher Education*, February 11, 2009. Available at <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/02/11/sheeo>.
 15. See CUPA-HR e-News, “Impact of Economic Crisis on Staffing and Compensation Planning” (February 18, 2009). http://www.cupahr.org/newsroom/news_template.asp?id=4650.
 16. Valerie Martin Conley, “Survey of Changes in Faculty Retirement Policies 2007,” American Association of University Professors, 2007.
 17. American Association of University Professors, Background Facts on Contingent Faculty. <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/issues/contingent/contingentfacts.htm>.

- Despite financial barriers in other arenas, construction costs are falling and building costs are likely to go down slightly in 2009.¹⁸

Strategic Questions for Libraries

1. The aging academic workforce has many implications for policy and practice. How should the library manage a potentially smaller but more stable workforce? Can libraries afford an aging workforce? How can career pathways be created in fiscally constrained institutions? Given the drastic reduction in discretionary funds, how does the library invest in staff development?
2. What new organizational structures are necessary to support emerging client demands given new fiscal constraints? How can libraries creatively redesign functions and services to realize cost savings and support student success and faculty productivity? How will the work of librarians change?
3. For many libraries, determining and demonstrating impact on student success remains elusive. Given potential funding opportunities for student success programs, how can the library demonstrate impact and value by developing or expanding programs to support students from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds?
4. Charles Lowry, executive director of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), calls on higher education to “build our digital infrastructure,” by putting library, museum, and related collections online through training 10,000 people to scan books, manuscripts, journals, and other materials in library collections.¹⁹ Is there a case to be made for securing ARRA funds for this important work?
5. If we assume, as David W. Lewis does, that it is imperative to “redevelop the library as the primary informal learning space on campus,”²⁰ how can the library realize this vision through cost-sharing collaborations with other units on campus?

Driver #2: Students

The federal government clearly views higher education as one antidote for economic decline. In his appeal to the nation and Congress, President Obama made a business case for higher education, saying, “in a global economy, where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity. It is a pre-requisite. Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma, and yet just over half of our citizens have that level of education.”²¹ President Obama has articulated an ambitious goal for the United States: to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

The 2010 federal budget proposal advances this goal by expanding federal support for students and their families. It includes unprecedented support for student aid, making Pell Grants an entitlement program indexed for inflation, consolidating student loan programs under federal supervision, providing permanent tax credits for families’ college spending, and expanding eligibility for Perkins loans.²²

18. Scott Carlson, “Tough Times, Silver Lining: Builders Lower Their Bids,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 13, 2009.

19. Charles B. Lowry, “Let’s Spur Recovery by Investing in Information,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 6, 2009.

20. David W. Lewis, “A Model for Academic Libraries 2005-2025,” (2006). Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/1805/665>.

21. Transcript of President Obama’s February 24, 2009, address to the United States Congress.

22. Sam Dillon, “Drilling Down on the Budget: Student Loans,” *New York Times* (February 27, 2009); Kelly Field, “President’s Budget Would End Bank-Based Student Lending and Significantly Expand Pell Grants,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (February 27, 2009); Doug Lederman, “Obama’s Budget Blockbuster,” *Inside Higher Ed* (February 27, 2009).

Some notable aspects of current and incoming student populations:

- The National Association for Business Economics expects the current recession to rival that of 1973-1975, with unemployment rising to (and peaking) at 9% by the end of the year.²³ In January 2009 the unemployment rate stood at 7.6% with 11.6 million persons currently unemployed. Over the past 12 months, the number of unemployed persons has increased by 4.1 million, and the unemployment rate has risen by 2.7 percentage points.²⁴
- As unemployed workers head back to school, many community colleges are reporting double-digit enrollment growth.²⁵
- An increased number of laid-off adults are expected to return to school seeking professional programs, community colleges, and certification programs.
- There is a major demographic shift underway. The traditional white college-age student population (with college-educated parents) will dramatically shrink between 2009 and 2015. During this same period, the percentage of graduates with no family history of attending college is expected to rise.²⁶
- Students (both traditional and nontraditional) will choose community college educations over four-year college educations in an effort to save money and reduce long-term debt; many are now choosing to transfer from a four-year college to a two-year college in what is termed "reverse transfer."²⁷
- Increasingly, multiple generations make up the student enrollment at most colleges (either virtually or physically). This trend is likely to persist as the unemployed return to retool and reskill.
- We are all "becoming" Generation Y (also known as the Net or Millennial generation). New research shows that increased access to sophisticated technological social tools and increased connectivity via smart phones, laptops, and other handheld devices is changing the behavior of several generations; other generations are taking on the characteristics of Generation Y. Frequently cited generational differences are beginning to blur.
- The gadget-savvy Millennial students do not fully comprehend the complex networked information world: "students may have confidence because they are unaware of the complexities involved [in using the Internet effectively] or just because they have grown up with technology. This potential gap between actual and perceived skills and literacy is important to understand and factor into strategies for teaching and learning at the institution."²⁸

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23. National Association for Business Economics Outlook Summary, February 26, 2009. At <http://www.nabe.com/publib/macsum.html>.
 24. U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Situation Summary, February 9, 2009. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>.
 25. George Boggs, president of the American Association of Community Colleges, quoted in "Unemployed Workers Heading Back to School," CNN, February 14, 2009. At <http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/02/14/unemployment.education/>.
 26. Alyse Ashburn, "After the Deluge, the Drought? How Admissions Officers are Preparing for a Shrinking Pool of Traditional Applicants," in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 2, 2008.
 27. David Moltz, "The New Reverse Transfer," *Inside Higher Education* (February 18, 2009) cited an 11% increase in reverse transfers (from four-year college to two-year college) to Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland. This trend is supported in other community college data.
 28. The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology 2008. Educause, 2008.

Strategic Questions for Libraries

1. President Obama's call to education, asking "every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training"²⁹ has tremendous implications for community colleges, for-profit institutions, and less selective four-year university enrollments. How should libraries at these institutions be planning to support greater numbers of students with frozen or reduced staffing levels?
2. How can libraries prepare to serve multiple-generation student populations?
3. Given the growing information-rich networked environment,³⁰ should information literacy be re-envisioned as media literacy? Does the library have a role in helping students develop the more sophisticated skills (including transmedia navigation, networking, distributed cognition, simulation, etc.) that Henry Jenkins believes are necessary to success in the 21st century?³¹

Driver #3: Technology

Steven Bell extends Gordon Gee's call for reinvention to the academic library: "Put simply, the library portal as we know it today is unsustainable. It, along with a host of other indicators such as declines in reference questions and shifts from print to e-resources, signals that for academic libraries a 'let's just keep doing business as usual' mentality is a sure path to obsolescence."³²

We call your attention to the following technology developments that have strategic importance for libraries.

- The advent of cloud computing, "an emerging architecture by which data and applications reside in cyberspace, allowing users to access them through any web-connected device,"³³ signals a move away from locally supported services. Library use of computing resources will also tend to move away from physically stored on-site capacities to the networked "cloud." It is possible that instead of having software installed on every desktop, users will access it in the cloud—applications such as Microsoft Office, e-mail programs, shared drives are all prospective candidates for moving to cloud computing. Cost reductions may be realized from such new capabilities. However, there are also risks related to the stability of the cloud or the industries hosting it, including security of information and privacy.
- The expanding capabilities of mobile or "smart" devices, such as phones and other handheld devices, are increasing student expectations for services.³⁴ Some colleges and universities are already creating courses to be delivered on cell phones.³⁵

29. Transcript of President Obama's February 24, 2009, address to the United States Congress.

30. Alison J. Head and Michael B. Eisenberg, "Finding Context: What Today's College Students Say about Conducting Research in the Digital Age," Project Information Literacy Progress Report, February 4, 2009, The Information School, University of Washington.

31. Henry Jenkins, "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century, A MacArthur Foundation Occasional Paper, 2006. http://digitallearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF.

32. Steven Bell, "The Library Web Site of the Future," *Inside Higher Ed*, February 17, 2009.

33. John B. Horrigan, "The Use of Cloud Computing and Services," Pew/Internet and American Life Project (September 2008). http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/262/report_display.asp.

34. According to the "Pew Future of the Internet III Report (December 11, 2008), "The mobile device will be the primary connection tool to the Internet for most people in the world in 2020." <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1053/future-of-the-internet-iii-how-the-experts-see-it>.

35. James Martin and James E. Samels, "Cellular Colleges: The Next Small Thing," in *University Business* (February 2009). http://www.universitybusiness.com/view_articlepf.aspx?articleid=1233.

- Prices for mobile devices and ultraportable laptops are dropping. As more students purchase these devices, there will be less reliance on the fields of computers typically found in information commons.
- There is increased use and expectation of distributed or diffused content, in addition to opportunities to create and share content. This can be seen in the increased use of syndication (such as RSS feeds), social networking sites, and the shift to interactivity on the Internet. Students, staff, faculty, and departments will increase their use of social networking tools. Currently student use of social networking sites for educational purposes is at a very nascent stage;³⁶ however, such use is expected to increase. An important aspect of this development is the expectation that technologies will not only afford and facilitate interaction between students but between students and faculty or staff on (or off) campus. Participation through feedback, comments on blogs, and in other vehicles (such as YouTube and Twitter) will increase along with expectations of responsiveness. Blackboard has already developed an application that delivers course information and updates from Blackboard to students inside Facebook.³⁷
- The trend in higher education toward open source and cloud computing, coupled with growing network security concerns, has created tension and debate. Open source use is growing, while new tools for managing network security are being created. The resulting conflict will impede decision making on campus and possibly restrict the use of some emerging programs and tools.
- The growth of e-learning, distributed learning, and blended learning will increase the demand for technology resources.³⁸ A recent study found that 58% of all colleges surveyed agreed that online courses were critical to their strategic success, with two-year colleges and for-profit schools anticipating the significant increases in non-traditional student enrollment.³⁹
- Demand on bandwidth capacity has reached a new high as a result of video and audio downloading and uploading by students and faculty, as well as by other resource-intensive applications. All participants in the academic enterprise are becoming more active consumers of bandwidth. Demand is increasing with no flattening in sight.
- Vendors of Web-based products for libraries are beginning to market their products directly to students and faculty. For example, ProQuest "GradShare" enables graduate students to find resources, get advice, and share experiences.⁴⁰
- Institutional repositories (IR) and other data and information resources need to be developed and expanded. According to ARL, "repository services are moving beyond pre-print and post-print dissemination to include a wide range of content types, clients, and service needs."⁴¹

Strategic Questions for Libraries

1. Given increased competition, how will bandwidth availability issues affect libraries moving to digitally delivered services, collections, and access? How will ARRA affect access to greater bandwidth for research resources (such as those supported by the library)?

36. College Board and Art & Science Group, "Social Networking Sites and College-Bound Students," in studentPOLL, vol.7 #2, 2009. <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/trends/studentpoll/social-networking>.

37. Andy Guess, "Facebook Meet Blackboard," *Inside Higher Education* (May 14, 2008).

38. Debra H. Allen, and Peter B. DeBlois, "Top Ten Issues 2008," in *EDUCAUSE Review* (May-June 2008).

39. I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, "Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States, 2008," Babson Survey Research Group. http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/staying_course.

40. <http://www.gradshare.com/landing.html>.

41. Charles B. Lowry, et al, "Transformational Times: An Environmental Scan Prepared for the ARL Strategic Plan Review Task Force," Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, February 2009.

2. How will libraries create Web-based products and services that can compete with commercial products sold directly to students and faculty? Should libraries compete or collaborate in this arena?
3. How can libraries develop a meaningful electronic presence as students shift away from static Web sites? As Steven Bell so aptly puts it: "First, how can libraries more effectively create awareness about their content so users can discover it? Second, what should replace the library portal?"⁴²
4. Consider the changes and developments in the role of the IR, the capabilities of the IR, and the technologies that are used to host and harvest data and information. What new work does this create for libraries? Are there potential natural partners for more effectively managing this service?

Conclusion

Distinguished panelists will discuss the questions raised here at the ACRL 14th National Conference in Seattle, March 13, 2009, during the program session "Brother Can You Spare a Dime? ACRL 2009 Strategic Thinking Guide for Academic Librarians in the New Economy." This paper is available on the ACRL Web site <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/future/acrlguide09.pdf> and on the ACRL 2009 Virtual National Conference site. We hope it will spur strategic conversation, planning, and action in academic libraries. As a snapshot in time, we acknowledge that new and unforeseen issues that will inevitably arise to reshape and change the questions we need to confront.

42. Steven Bell, "The Library Web Site of the Future," in *Inside Higher Ed*, February 17, 2009.