"Building a Library for the Emerging Scholarly Communications Environment"

DALHOUSIE LIBRARIES' STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
2004 – 2008

Dal *libraries*

Introduction

The Libraries' existing Strategic Plan was written to provide a context for, and give guidance to, decisions affecting collections, services and administrative organization through to the end of 2003. As the time of this plan has come to an end and with the announcement of the "President's Strategic Focus" which recommends we "review University library strategy—on-line and on-shelf," it is incumbent upon the libraries to produce a new plan which aligns itself more closely with the President's vision.

Much has been accomplished under the libraries' existing plan while much more can and will continue to be done to further the objectives contained therein. Concentrated effort is required, for example, to "develop effective organizational structures," an area where more discussion and planning is needed as service requirements evolve.

Although the essential objectives of the libraries in terms of acquisition / access, collections,

preservation, dissemination and services will not change, there is an opportunity and need to put them in the context of a new strategic focus to ensure that we are building the best library to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving scholarly communication system. This system is being driven and fundamentally changed by the new capabilities of digital production, communication and dissemination.

The Libraries have recognized and kept a watch on these changes but have not formally nor strategically embraced them. There is now sufficient evidence and momentum to suggest that digital collections and services are a critically important part of the libraries' future ability to serve the information needs of the university and its anticipated growth in population.

Therefore, the Libraries new strategic plan will focus on building new physical and virtual spaces and partnering more deliberately with Faculties and other University services to take full advantage of the positive aspects of technology.

Recurring Strengths, Weaknesses and Perceptions

During the process of formulating the original plan the libraries conducted a number of focus group to determine strengths, weaknesses and perceptions.   These have changed some in the last three years but with a few amendments continue to form a valid basis upon which to create a new plan.

Strengths:

The Libraries have some excellent strengths on which to build:

- history, reputation, and location at Dalhousie
- good basic arts, science and reference collections
- one of Dalhousie's most public faces
- document delivery
- continually pursuing increased electronic access
- friendly, helpful and knowledgeable staff
- proximity to computer services
- improved reliability of library systems
- the Information Commons and the recognition it has brought
- Novanet catalogue as a resource sharing tool

Recurring Strengths, Weaknesses and Perceptions

Weaknesses:

The Libraries, however, also have several weaknesses which might restrict their ability to plan and implement effectively:

- the collection is inadequate to meet the needs of the community
- physical plant is still generally inadequate and unappealing
- current state of Novanet system
- some equipment is dated and poorly maintained
- tradition and governing structure makes (radical) change difficult
- lack of marketing focus

Recurring Strengths, Weaknesses and Perceptions

Information Sources in the Future:

When queried about what will constitute the best information sources in the future, the groups responded that:

- people will get information from the "best" sources, regardless of physical location
- more and more information will be retrieved in electronic formats from more user-friendly databases
- more services will be delivered to the customer's desktop
- librarians will have the same role but more in servicing the needs of the above three trends

Perceptions of the Libraries

Asked how the principal users (students and faculty) perceived the libraries, three themes emerged:

- intimidating both in terms of physical set-up and service access (especially true of the Killam)
- poor and deteriorating state of collections
- insufficient support for electronic information access

Partnering and Better Learning Spaces

There are a number of ways to address the identified strengths, weaknesses and perceptions as outlined above. The existing plan was one approach which produced a number of measurable successes.

However, revisiting the "external trends" of the previous planning exercise, another approach clearly suggests itself.

1. continued rapid change—the digital revolution, growth of the internet, shift from print medium to electronic media, quick obsolescence of some areas of knowledge
2. increasing availability of information delivered in electronic form
3. increased demand for remote access
4. continuing rising cost of obtaining certain types of information—cost of journals, user fees
5. rising expectation—for simplicity, for quick and easy access, demand for seamless access
6. increased enrolment at Dalhousie

These trends have become routine and now demand a more focused response to challenges and opportunities posed by the digital technologies and the prospect of a radically new scholarly communications system—a demand and need to build our content, digital access, digital services and new learning spaces.

The libraries have already accomplished a great deal in taking full advantage of the value and flexibility provided by digital technologies towards fulfillment of their role as libraries in the new millennium: we have built and are building Commons spaces; we have discussed virtual reference and digital reserve collections; many of our serials collections have been converted to online only; the Archives has several digitization projects in hand; the creation of an institutional repository is being explored; the demand for services and tools related to GIS is growing; we are delivering library instruction online; and we are seeing the need for new position

descriptions that reflect a growing involvement in digital initiatives. All of these elements are indicative of, or support, the concept of libraries as partners in scholarship and facilitators of new learning opportunities enabled by the digital age.

There is no suggestion with this new plan that the libraries will abandon any of their traditional values or objectives. This plan recommends a concerted effort to prepare the libraries to operate more responsively and efficiently in the digital age by capitalizing on its strengths and thereby remaining in tune with the evolving information needs of our scholarly community.

The libraries will not end their efforts to build relevant print collections, to improve access to print collections at other locations, or to employ non-digital technologies and services where it is deemed to be appropriate and serves the needs of our community best. The libraries will seek funding for

both print and digital collections as well as operations which have been sorely affected and neglected through years of small but significant budget cuts.

Throughout the term of this new plan special attention will be paid to better prepare staff for work in an environment which will require a higher level of technical skills, professional skills and flexibility.

The digital services, collections and products which the libraries have implemented so far have been very effective in meeting the needs of faculty and students on campus and at a distance. It is necessary to build upon those successes and strengths and to use them more effectively so that Dalhousie can meet the information requirements of the present community as well as our future growing community which will be increasingly rooted in the application of solutions which support and take full advantage of new learning technologies.

Mission and Vision

Although there is some change in focus in the new plan towards more partnering and the creation of improved learning spaces exemplified by the Commons, the Mission and Vision as carefully crafted in the first plan have not changed in substance. They remain as relevant today and in the foreseeable future as when they were first formulated.

MISSION:

We advance learning and scholarship in our communities by providing expert and innovative access to the world's information and knowledge.

VISION: "We are the source for scholarly information and a vital partner in the continual enhancement of the Dalhousie learning environment."

We, the Dalhousie University Libraries, are central to all members of the Dalhousie University community. We are the gateway to regional, national and global resources. We are partners in the learning environment. We are essential to the heart of scholarly discourse on campus and in the community.

We provide innovative, friendly, and responsive services both on and off-site. We provide opportunities and facilities for collaborative learning. We promote outreach and community-based initiatives. We take a leadership role in the university and professional communities through the teaching of information literacy and knowledge management skills and by facilitating access to the best information resources.

We anticipate and actively address the needs of our communities.

Strategic Direction 1: Connect with faculty and students

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To ensure that the Dalhousie University community always sees us as the starting point for meeting its information needs.

- Continue to assess the quality of our services and anticipate user needs
  - o Develop ongoing communications/feedback with our community
- Enhance presence on and off campus
  - o Improve web presence
  - o Improve signage
  - o Improve marketing and communications
- Improve staff and user competencies in accessing the "collections"
  - o Train users and staff in content, skills and technology
- Develop and promote information literacy (e.g., information sourcing and management)
- Increase the visibility and usability of Archives and Special Collections

Strategic Direction 2: Optimize access and collections development

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To be the information gateway for the Dalhousie University community

- Develop a 5 yr. collection plan that responds to the instructional and research needs of the community
  - o Expand scholarly monograph acquisition
  - o Expand eResource acquisition (including books)
  - o Promote/participate in national and regional consortium licensing
  - o Develop collection preservation strategy (physical and virtual)
  - o Organize physical collections for efficient location and retrieval
- Implement new and improved information management software
  - o Update library management system
  - o Develop a library portal (Atlantic)
  - o Implement "Library on a laptop"
- Encourage alternative publishing models
  - o Build institutional repositories
  - o Partner on archival publishing
  - o Partner on electronic publishing
  - o Support and promote the Open Access initiative
- Focus Archives on University output

***Strategic Direction 3*:**   Create effective learning environments

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To prepare students for an information intensive and increasingly collaborative world

- Extend the Information Commons (space, integration of services, complementary instructional services, etc.)
- Create several complementary learning environments in the libraries (collaborative spaces for faculty and students, life-long learning spaces)
- Provide space for learning experiments
- Improve user-initiated services (inter-library loan / document delivery, electronic reserves)
- Revitalize existing library environments

Strategic Direction 4: Partner in the learning enterprise

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To improve Faculty's research and
teaching effectiveness and student
learning outcomes

- Situate librarians in Faculties on a regular, part-time basis
- Actively partner with other units on campus
  - Partner in the creation of virtual learning environments
  - Provide collaborative learning environments
  - Partner with other IT operational units (UCIS, CLT)
- Package eContent and services for Faculties (e.g., Medicine, Engineering, Management)
- Participate in teaching and research proposals
- Improve the information seeking and information management skills of graduate students