

UBC Library SWOT Analysis

In considering the UBC Library SWOT Analysis, please read it thinking about the following questions:

Generally, what conclusions can we draw about priorities for action from this SWOT Analysis?

What should we do more of?
What should we do less of?

What should we stop doing?
What should we start doing?

What are the priorities for action in each area?

Strengths

Which strengths must we capitalize on in order to reach our vision and how will we do so?

What leverage can be gained from our strengths?

Weaknesses

Which weaknesses must we shore up in order to reach our vision and how will we do so?

What must we improve?

Opportunities

Which opportunities should we seize in order to reach our vision and how should we go about it?

What are the priorities for action?

Threats

What can we do to minimize the impact of these threats so that we can reach our vision?

What are the priorities for action?

UBC Library Planning



UBC Library SWOT Analysis

January 25, 2000

Introduction

The following is an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the UBC Library and the opportunities and threats it faces (SWOT Analysis) based on the thoughts, opinions, and perceptions of UBC Library librarians and staff.

First of all, ULAC members, divided into four groups, developed their top five points under each category. The input from each of the groups was then integrated to yield a preliminary document reflecting the input of all ULAC members. Each Library staff member was then asked to complete a questionnaire soliciting her or his top five points for each category. A series of meetings were then held where staff met with their colleagues and their Division/Branch Head to develop an integrated list for their unit, or group of units in the case of some small branches. These unit lists were then integrated into the document developed by ULAC to provide a draft analysis, which was circulated to all staff for comment and further input. A final version was then prepared.

It is important to note that while there is general agreement on the points listed under each category, the narrative of the analysis includes the views and opinions of individual staff members. Some of these represent minority viewpoints, and some may be unique to a particular individual. No formal validation or weighting has been applied to the opinions and comments received.

UBC Library Strengths

1. Excellent, experienced staff

- *knowledgeable*
- *energetic leadership*
- *experienced with change and strategic planning*
- *supportive environment*
- *staff development*

The UBC Library's staff – librarians, M&P, and support staff – see themselves as being at the forefront of the information business. There is general agreement that Library staff

are knowledgeable, service-oriented, flexible, and that they try to co-operate with each other in fulfilling their responsibilities. Staff feel that they are dedicated to the Library and the University, and that they care about the needs of the Library's users. They are seen as experienced in dealing with change and strategic planning, and are considered to provide energetic leadership.

Staff development and training activities provide a supportive environment for Library staff. The Library tries to ensure that the skills and abilities of all staff are used to the fullest extent permitted by classification systems and collective agreements, but a few staff members feel that untapped talent still exists throughout the Library.

2. Partnerships and Profile

- *co-operation with other libraries and organizations*
- *collaboration on campus*
- *reporting relationship and position of University Librarian*
- *size and reputation*
- *status in province*
- *geographical position – Pacific Rim*
- *Catherine Quinlan*
- *international reputation*

The UBC Library is the largest library in western Canada. It is renowned internationally and within Canada for the size of its collection, the reputation of the University Librarian, Catherine Quinlan, and its record for service and collaboration. Its geographical location has helped to make it a major centre for Pacific Rim studies. The Library co-operates with a wide range of other libraries and institutions, both directly and through organizations such as the Council of Pacific and Prairie University Libraries, the Canadian Association of Research Libraries, the Association of Research Libraries, and the Electronic Library Network.

The Library's reputation is founded on its record of past achievements. Within the province, it appears to enjoy a positive image, and has gained much goodwill through its service to other libraries and off-campus user groups. On campus, the Library receives strong support from faculty, students, and the University Administration, and the Library now reports to the Vice-President, Academic and Provost.

3. Organization and Services

- *service ethic/orientation*
- *faculty/user relations*
- *support from Univ. Administration*
- *branch system*
- *subject specialists close to users*

The Library's organization and services are strongly influenced by its service ethic/orientation and focus on user needs. The Library attempts to provide equitable

services to its primary users, the students, faculty and staff of UBC, but there is also an outward focus on the larger community, for the Library is open to all who wish to use its resources. The Library is open to its users for long hours – longer than other campus services. In addition, its electronic services, including internet access, are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Through its branch system, the Library places subject experts close to users to provide information, reference, and other specialized services. The Library aims at cross-unit standardization, where appropriate, to ensure efficiency and consistency in provision of services. One-on-one help for the entire University community supplements strong and varied training programs for users, a comprehensive website, and an extensive range of publications. Feedback from and consultation with faculty and other user groups and staff input into management and planning processes are designed to ensure that services meet user needs.

The Library's hiring policies and practices focus on recruiting and retaining staff committed to service excellence. In developing its services, the Library makes innovative use of funding initiatives, such as co-op funding, collection and technology endowments, and grants from government and other agencies. The Library also provides a supportive environment for developing or participating in value-added cost-recoverable services, such as Cataloguing in Publication, Document Delivery, Patscan, and Copy Services.

4. Collections

- *good collections in certain areas*
- *print/electronic*
- *University support*

The UBC Library has a large and broad collection of information resources, both in traditional print format and in electronic format. The collection contains current as well as retrospective materials, and extensive journal holdings. In certain areas, the collection is very strong, and contains significant and unique holdings. Examples include but are not limited to BC history, Asian-language materials, the Lowry collection, and historical maps.

The Library's in-house collection is supplemented by access to a wide range of electronic indexes and resources, including the provision of access to remote resources via ILL/Pegasus at no charge to users. The Library's collection development activities have been supported by the University Administration through continuing increases to the collections budget in the face of cuts to other areas of the budget.

5. Infrastructure

- *technology and electronic infrastructure*

The Library maintains an extensive technological and electronic infrastructure to support its services. It provides a substantial number of resources online, including the Web

catalogue, and provides remote access to other resources around the world. Print and downloading facilities are available to users. The Library purchased the DRA system to support its public services as well as its behind-the-scenes technical and processing services.

All staff have access to a workstation and e-mail is used widely for communication. To date, the Library and its Systems Division appear to have been able to keep pace with technological change and developments. The Library also provides its users with access to study space, including individual study space, group study rooms, and computer lab space.

UBC Library Weaknesses

1. Space and Facilities

- *inadequate and substandard*
- *poorly maintained*
- *decentralization*
- *split/stored collections*
- *deteriorating collections*
- *security*
- *Special Collections*

Except for the new Koerner Library, most of the Library's facilities are inadequate or substandard for both collections and users. In addition, buildings are poorly maintained, and there is a general lack of cleanliness. Most staff feel that there are substantial risks to these facilities and the collections, users, and staff they house from environmental hazards such as floods, fire, or earthquake. Poor environmental conditions contribute to the deterioration of rare and unique materials throughout the Library, but most significantly in Special Collections and Fine Arts.

Out-dated structures can also pose personal security and safety risks for both users and staff, make it difficult to instal new equipment and technology, and lead to poor working conditions for staff. Lack of adequate space has led to split or stored collections and decentralization of services with consequent inconvenience to users. The Library does not provide 24 hour a day study space, nor does it make available word processing and related software to its users. Computing facilities for users, especially student lab space, are inadequate to meet the demand.

2. Inadequate Staff Resources

- *lack of staff renewal*
- *no succession plan*
- *loss of experience and knowledge*
- *aging staff*
- *fatigue, burnout*

- *heavy workloads limit opportunities*
- *cannot meet growing user demands*
- *no time to write grant proposals*
- *no systems support to put up new databases*

The UBC Library's staff is aging, and fatigue, burn-out, and other stress-related health issues are affecting performance and productivity. Due to demographic reasons, the number of librarians and support staff who reach retirement age each year or who opt to take early retirement has been increasing, with a consequent loss of experience, knowledge, institutional memory, reference expertise, and familiarity with important print collections. At present, there is no formal replacement or succession plan for Library staff.

Budget reductions have constrained staff renewal and replacement. *Ad hoc* and opportunistic staffing cuts have had to be made when vacancies occurred to avoid layoffs, often, in the opinion of some staff members, without enough consideration of the effect on Library services. The result is that there are not enough staff members to represent all subject areas or knowledge specializations. A few Division/Branch Heads feel that the distribution of positions now bears little relationship to the size and information demands of user communities served by specific units.

Many librarians feel that they cannot keep up with growing user demands, that there is insufficient time to write grant proposals or do collections development work, and that there is not enough Systems staff available to mount and support new databases. More specifically, some librarians observe that they cannot keep up with the proliferation of electronic journals and resources, that there is little time for reflection or planning, and that heavy workloads limit opportunities. A few staff members feel that such workload pressure has led to a decline in collegiality, collaboration, co-operation, and two-way communication.

A few staff members feel that management skills of supervisors are uneven, or that there is insufficient accountability at various levels. Most staff note the lack of opportunity for staff advancement, especially at the senior support staff and librarian level, a result of the effect of budget reductions and reduced non-retirement turnover. Some librarians feel that there are too few professional staff, and too many underused support staff. At least one individual feels that there is no procedure or desire to seek out untapped talent, although classifications and contracts pose barriers. Some librarians and more support staff feel that support staff work is often not valued highly enough.

Rigid classifications and positions foster inflexibility, sometimes exacerbated by individuals who are reluctant or unable to take on new roles or responsibilities. Some Division/Branch Heads feel that insufficient training to make better use of new technology leads to problems in dealing with users who are more technologically advanced than staff. Finally, low salaries, especially for support staff, continue to be a disincentive, and make it difficult to attract the best candidates for UBC Library positions.

3. Organization and Services

- *aging service models in context of changing communication needs*
- *large, fragmented organization*
- *no customer support for dial-in users*
- *uneven depth of services across subject areas*
- *lack of shared vision*
- *limited and uneven partnerships with other academic units/staff*

To some extent, the Library is still operating with traditional service models in a context of changing communication and information needs. Some librarians feel that the Library doesn't do enough to learn from best practices at other institutions. One Division/Branch Head attributed this to an institutional culture of 'splendid isolation' – removed from other libraries/institutions.

The organization is large and fragmented, with a centralized management, decentralized branch system, and a large number of service points. Some staff members feel that this leads to difficulty in communication, particularly with decentralized processing and financial staff. Technical services staff feel, or are seen to be, isolated in the Library Processing Centre, although some decentralization of technical services to public service units has taken place. There is a view on the part of some technical services staff that technical services staff are considered expendable. Some staff members attribute a reduction in the quality of cataloguing to a reduction in cataloguing staff.

Some Division/Branch Heads and librarians see a need for a centralized collections unit to co-ordinate collection development. A few librarians feel there is a lack of communication about major collections decisions, such as the choice of vendors. Some librarians with collections responsibilities feel there is not enough participation in inter-institutional co-operative collection development.

Some librarians are concerned that the Library has no formal campus-wide mandate for information instruction. They note that there is no mandatory introductory library and information skills training for students, and that course-integrated bibliographic instruction is lacking for most faculties. They feel that partnerships with other academic units and staff are restricted and uneven, and that the communication and marketing of Library services and resources to the University community is not as effective as it could be.

Some Division/Branch Heads and librarians feel there is an uneven depth of services across subject areas, and that there has been a deterioration in the training and knowledge of staff at service desks. They draw attention to the lack of customer support for dial-in users. Many staff members feel that the resources devoted to stack maintenance and shelfreading are insufficient. Some support staff members feel there are too many different loan periods for staff to deal with. Some staff members are concerned that the Library is not developing usage statistics for materials.

A few Division/Branch Heads and librarians feel that the Library's hierarchic organizational structure hampers innovation, creativity, and even common sense. They feel that the Library administration has been shortsighted in respect to long-term planning, and that central managers are too far removed from users and services. In their view, bureaucracy, slow processes, overly centralized decision-making, and conservatism characterize the organization. Some librarians and support staff feel there is lack of real staff input, that consultation is illusory, and that often there is no feedback when task force or committee recommendations are not accepted. They see a gulf between management and staff, the result of miscommunication, a lack of trust, and a lack of a shared vision.

4. Inadequate Systems and Technological Infrastructure

- *OPAC*
- *ordering*
- *Recon not finished*
- *connectivity problems*

Some Division/Branch Heads are concerned that most computer-related functions are still centralized in Systems, and they feel there is insufficient local technical help and training at the unit level. Some staff members feel that there is a preference for non-cutting edge technology, and little flexibility in the choice of hardware or software for individuals or units. There is general recognition of the major connectivity problems the Library faces. Some staff members feel that the Library is slow to get new technology, and some assert that often Systems needs drive the Library, rather than Library needs driving Systems. Some librarians express concern about the Library's dependence on external services for electronic support.

Many staff members feel that the online public access catalogue (OPAC) is too slow and needs more embedded links. In general, they feel that DRA needs too much tweaking, and that response time is slow. Staff members express concern about the integrity of the database in terms of accuracy, completeness, and timeliness. Some staff members consider that DRA processing modules are inadequate, e.g. no ability to claim missing serials issues, the inability to display East Asian characters.

Some staff members with ILL/RSS responsibilities feel that the Resource Sharing Services system is too complex, cumbersome and unreliable, and that the Ariel system and scanning equipment is outdated. Some librarians feel that campus-wide CD-ROM access is poor, and that the Library needs a better way of handling electronic resources. Some staff members are concerned about problems with ordering of materials and the fact that Recon is not yet finished, and some question the Library's commitment to the processing and cataloguing of new books. A few staff members are concerned that some collections are not tattle-taped or controlled to prevent theft and vandalism.

5. Funding

- *insufficient to meet needs for materials and services*

- *decreased serials subscriptions*
- *inadequate 1 year budget planning cycle*

Lack of sufficient funding affects all areas of the Library. There is general consensus that the Library's budget is insufficient to meet the needs for materials, services, facilities, equipment, and human resources. Budget reductions affect processing levels, and have led to a reduction of serials subscriptions through cancellations. Funding is inadequate to keep up with the requirements for new technology and equipment replacement.

Staff members are concerned about pay inequities and lack of incentives. Many librarians feel that funds to support academic travel and conference attendance are inadequate. The University's one-year budget cycle, with a requirement to expend operating funds by the end of each fiscal year, is not seen by some to result in the most effective use of available funding. At least one Division/Branch Head feels that inadequate participation of librarians in major lobbying groups at all political levels contributes to funding problems.

Opportunities for the UBC Library

1. Academic Plan/ Trek 2000

- *curriculum change*
- *collaboration and teaching*
- *raised profile of Library*
- *redefined role of Library*
- *environment for change*
- *learning commons*
- *"ahead of the curve" - initiate change*
- *distance education and delivery of services*
- *new learning models/information technology*

New academic planning initiatives at the University level provide an environment for change and a new curriculum. An increasing emphasis on collaboration and teaching may lead to a redefined role and raised profile for the Library. Many Division/Branch Heads and librarians feel that the Library should be "ahead of the curve" and initiate change.

Expanding disciplines and interdisciplinary studies may require the provision of more pertinent and responsive user services. These could include online access to core course materials, self-directed interlibrary loans, the development of a learning commons and other improvements in facilities for Library users. The adoption of new learning models and the increased incorporation of information technology in learning activities may require expanded and integrated instruction and training programs for students and faculty. These could focus on faculty research assistants, information technology, evaluation of Web resources, or the use of personal bibliographic software.

The growing role of distance education and the delivery of services to students at a distance can contribute to the development of the 'virtual librarian.' An increasing

participation by the University in the wider community could result in the provision of for-profit research services to the private sector.

2. New Sources of Funding

- *cooperation and partnerships*
- *Canadian Foundation for Innovation*
- *Canadian Institutes for Health Research*
- *non-traditional sources*
- *links with industry*
- *non-government sources*
- *donors*

Budget reductions can ‘shock’ the organization, force reassessment of priorities, and make it consider non-traditional funding sources. Some librarians feel that the latter could include library suppliers or publishers. There is general agreement that the Library should continue to expand its fund raising activities, seek out new donors, and establish links with the private sector and other non-government sources of funding. Wherever possible, it should seek endowments for collections, facilities, and staff.

Co-operation and partnerships will be vital, as will support from new granting agencies such as the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and the Canadian Institutes for Health Research. Staff suggestions for new in-house funding sources include the production and marketing of posters, cards, etc. developed from Special Collections materials, and the operation of a Friends of the Library gift shop.

3. Staff Renewal

- *injection of new skills*
- *innovative replacement of retiring staff*
- *reorganization*
- *career development*

An innovative approach to the replacement of retiring staff offers the possibility of improvements in services and productivity, as well as the injection of new skills into the organization. Staff renewal can provide opportunities for reorganization, the re-allocation of resources, and the rethinking of current practices. Career development and the effective use of training could be critical components of a staff renewal program.

The Library could better utilize the talents and skills of all staff, especially the knowledge of its senior employees. For example, a number of staff members feel that there should be staff involvement in the strategic planning process. Others note that to obtain maximum value from training, the Library should provide the chance to use such training in the workplace. The Library could also make greater use of external learning opportunities such as conferences and workshops, where staff could be encouraged to demonstrate their information skills expertise.

4. Technology

- *paper to electronic*
- *digital collections*
- *e-commerce*
- *e-books*
- *videoconferencing*
- *publishing paradigm changing*
- *WebCT*
- *cheaper*
- *less space*
- *better access*
- *increasing amount of electronic resources*
- *internet alternatives to library services*
- *web evaluation*
- *national alternatives to let us focus*

New technology is accelerating the shift from paper to electronic information resources. In the long run this may lead to better and cheaper access for users, and shift the requirement for Library space from an emphasis on collections to an emphasis on users. Electronic resources are growing in number, and new developments include e-books as well as e-journals. Some staff members feel that the growing importance of electronic collections suggest that digitizing the UBC Library's rare materials should be a priority. The publishing paradigm is changing, and e-commerce offers possibilities of more cost-effective ways of dealing with vendors.

WebCT, other web-based learning systems, videoconferencing, and other methods of distance education can provide an enhanced role for the Library. The opportunity could be there for value-added work in terms of the presentation of Library collections and remote resources, including the online display of resources in East Asian and other non-Roman characters. There may be many internet alternatives to Library services, and there could be an increased demand for the evaluation of such web resources. The Library should take a leadership role in the use of new information technology that would provide new learning opportunities for staff.

5. Partnerships and Profile

- *local, regional, international*
- *gateway location – Pacific Rim*
- *UBC/Vancouver*
- *growth*
- *international profile*
- *linkages*

The opportunity is there for the Library to build and strengthen partnerships at the local, regional, national, and international levels, based on its Pacific Rim gateway location. On

campus, the Library can build partnerships with faculty by establishing closer ties to teaching programs. Through its services to the off-campus community, the Library could contribute to an enlarged UBC presence within the Greater Vancouver area. Within the province, the Library could work for greater post-secondary institutional co-operation, as well as gain recognition for its *de facto* provincial role.

National agreements could enable the Library to focus on its strengths and unique resources, while participation in national site licenses offers the possibility of providing Library users with wider access to more resources at less cost than the Library would pay on its own. Participation in co-operative collection development, global resource sharing, and expanded international information networking could establish linkages that would benefit Library users and raise the Library's international profile as it shared not only its resources but also its expertise with other institutions.

Threats to the UBC Library

1. Restrictive Copyright and Licensing Agreements

- *including archiving issues*

The purchase, lease, or subscription costs of electronic materials continue to hamper the Library's ability to provide convenient access to all available electronic resources to its user community. Licensing agreements place limits on who has access to specific electronic resources and the number of simultaneous users who can use them. In many instances, it is not clear who owns and retains electronic backfiles when subscriptions are cancelled. To date, publishers and copyright holders have been unwilling to grant libraries the right to scan print materials and make them available to users in electronic format. This continues to be a major barrier to the provision and distribution of electronic course reserves in support of teaching and learning activities.

2. Alternative Information Providers

- *internal as well as external*
- *vendors bypass libraries and go direct to users*
- *users find information elsewhere*
- *cheaper/faster alternate suppliers*

The Library may be faced with internal as well as external competition in providing information. As some staff members have noted, the Library does not have an exclusive campus mandate to provide information resources, and other campus departments, such as IT Services, could become competitors in the electronic environment. Vendors of electronic resources and databases can bypass libraries and market their products directly to users, and they may do so to a greater extent.

Many users already find information elsewhere, and others may be willing to go to alternate suppliers who are cheaper or who can provide faster service. Negative user attitudes and apathy towards the UBC Library may make such alternative suppliers more

attractive. The failure or inability to keep up with new developments in information technology could also lead to the loss of Library users. Some staff members feel that undue fear about competition could hamper the Library in recognizing its strengths and meeting the needs of its users.

3. Rate of Change in Information Field and Information Technology

- *difficult for staff to keep up*
- *difficult for organization to adapt*
- *misconception of role of library vs. what information technology can provide*
- *managing electronic resources*
- *misconception that electronic library will not need buildings*
- *short life span of hardware and software*
- *not listening to users/not anticipating evolving needs*

Changes in how the University offers its courses, e.g. degree programs delivered via the internet and other online and distance education initiatives, may affect the Library and its staff. Some staff members are concerned that computing resources may be seen as more important than staff, and that this may lead to a reduction in the ability of individual units to customize services to fit unique user demands. Already it is becoming increasingly difficult for Library staff to keep up with the rapid and accelerating rate of change in both information technology and the information field. The management of electronic resources is becoming more complex and time-consuming.

It is not easy for the organization to adapt – what will be the role of an academic library in the future? Many librarians feel that there is a misconception on the part of users about the role of the Library and its services and of what information technology can provide. There is also the mistaken belief in the minds of some users that the ‘electronic’ library would not need buildings or physical facilities but could exist as a virtual entity. The short life span of hardware and software imposes financial pressures on the Library. Most librarians would agree that not listening to users and staff, and not anticipating evolving user needs would be fatal.

4. Funding and the Economy

- *less funding*
- *less control over some of the funding*
- *BC government financial difficulties*
- *budget cutbacks*
- *weak Canadian \$*
- *failure to maintain facilities*
- *failure to ensure preservation of collection*
- *cost of living in Vancouver and recruitment of new staff*
- *increasing cost of materials*
- *escalating cost of technology*

It is clear that if BC government financial difficulties continue, there may be less provincial funding for the University and thus for the Library. There could be continuing budget cutbacks. Moreover, the University may have less control over some of the funding, which may be designated for specific purposes. Some librarians are concerned that more corporate sponsorship and an increasing reliance on private sector funding may pose a threat to academic freedom.

Some staff members feel that there may be increasing pressure to charge for services, and that less value may be placed on the needs and functions of the humanities component of research libraries. Funding shortfalls could result in the inability to meet basic program needs equitably across all disciplines, the inability to maintain facilities, the inability to keep up with new technology, and the inability to ensure preservation of collection. Some librarians feel that the increasing cost of information resources, both print and electronic, coupled with a weak Canadian dollar and strong foreign currencies could result in a 'dumbed down' collection, forcing users to go elsewhere to meet their information needs. Lack of funding could mean fewer staff, low salaries, and low morale. The cost of living in Vancouver already makes it difficult to recruit staff, and funding limitations that restrict hiring of librarians to new graduates could compromise the Library's ability to maintain services and to develop new ones quickly. Some staff members feel that funding restrictions could lead to more centralized decision-making.

5. Dependence on Other Institutions

- *lack of autonomy*
- *CANet*
- *CISTI*
- *NTIS*
- *SFU*

Increasingly the Library is giving up its autonomy as it enters into more co-operative ventures and partnerships. The Library is now dependent on other institutions and organizations such as CANet, CISTI, NTIS, and Simon Fraser University for the maintenance of key components of its information technology infrastructure or the provision of specific electronic resources to UBC users. Rather than owning resources, more and more the Library is providing temporary access to resources held remotely.

Prepared by: Erik de Bruijn

January 25, 2000

C:\my documents\library\planning\swot\swotlistfinalrev2staff