Assessing the Strategic Credibility of Special Collections

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Why is strategic credibility important now?

• In time of justifying budgets, people, positions, services, and space, how do we communicate our value and place within parent institutions (the university)?
• Necessary shift from just informing to influencing the stakeholder’s point of view (“talk their talk”)
• Accountability, assessment
Strategic Credibility

“...refers to how other others view the company’s overall corporate strategy and its strategic planning capability.”

Benefits of Strategic Credibility

- Improved relations with stakeholders
- Better morale of employees
- More goal focused employees
- Attracting talented people motivated by the strategy

Higgins and Diffenbach (1989)
Strategic Credibility Factors

- Demonstrated performance
- Capability to strategize
- Communication of organizational strategy to key stakeholders
- Credibility of organizational leadership

Higgins (2002)
## Library Strategic Credibility Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demonstrated performance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Assessment</td>
<td>- Mission statement</td>
<td>- Website</td>
<td>- Leadership</td>
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<td>- Annual reports</td>
<td>- Vision</td>
<td>- Newsletters</td>
<td>- Active librarians</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Strategic planning</td>
<td>- Accessibility of information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Collection policies</td>
<td>- Performance</td>
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Higgins (2002)
Strategic Credibility of Academic Libraries

"Are academic libraries following through with their planning and objectives?"


- Decline in annual reports, rise in strategic plans
- Canadian libraries were user-focused vs. U.S. libraries more trend focused
- Themes: space, assessment, information literacy, offsite storage
- Overall limited communication of strategic planning
Library vs. Library Units

Budget
Resource Allocation
Collaboration opportunities
During times of transition
If a university administrator asked you how your library unit contributes value to the overall university mission, vision, and strategic goals... how would you respond, and with what evidence?
Our paper focuses on

• Demonstrated Performance (evidence)
• Capability to Strategize (evidence)
• Communication to Stakeholders (action/use)
• Leadership (who)

*A note on subjectivity*
Methodology: Population Orbis Cascade Alliance (by institution type)

- Public 2-year academic: 43%
- Small public 4-year academic (less than 10,000 FTE students): 19%
- Medium public 4-year academic (10,000-15,000 FTE students): 19%
- Large public 4-year academic (more than 15,000 FTE students): 14%
- Private 4-year academic: 5%
Strategic Planning: Population

Orbis Cascade Libraries: 37
Libraries with Special Collections/Archives: 32
Special Collections/Archives with easily accessible mission statements: 13
Who had mission statements?
[only 13 out of 37]

By institution type

- Public 2-year academic: 31%
- Small public 4-year academic (less than 10,000 FTE students): 7%
- Medium public 4-year academic (10,000-15,000 FTE students): 23%
- Large public 4-year academic (more than 15,000 FTE students): 31%
- Private 4-year academic: 8%
Methodology for “strategic planning”

• Individually examined College/University mission statements for themes
  o Discussed findings and reached consensus

• Individually examined Special Collections/Archives mission statements
  o Included multiple departments at one institution if they had mission statements (N=18, not 13)
  o Discussed findings and reached consensus

• Negotiated common themes (how well aligned)
Example: OSU Mission Statement

"As a land grant institution committed to teaching, research, and outreach and engagement, Oregon State University promotes economic, social, cultural and environmental progress for the people of Oregon, the nation and the world...”

http://oregonstate.edu/main/mission

- Teaching
- Outreach/engagement/land grant/Oregon serving
- Economic/promoting economic growth
- Cultural/social/social progress
- Competitive grads/academic excellence
- Search for new knowledge/research
Example OSU: Archives

Mission Statement and Access Policy
The University Archives is authorized to collect, describe, preserve, make accessible to the public, and display historical records created or received in connection with the transaction of University affairs.

http://archives.library.oregonstate.edu/handbook/chapter4/mission.html
What are most archives/special collections mission statements saying?

- historical value
- diverse collections
- public programming
- responsible stewardship
- long-term value
- guide to its past
- institutional history
- permanent value
- canned language
- valuable collections
- cultural heritage materials
- collective memory
- dynamic collections
- enduring value
- official repository
- notable items
- unique resources
- mandated
- resource center
Overall Special Collections/Archives Alignment with College/University Mission

N = 18
Percentages of Alignment Between College/University and Special Collections/Archives

N = 18
Common Aligned Themes in Mission Comparison

College/University mission statements

Special Collections/Archives mission statements

Research (7)
Subject area (4)
Teaching, Education, Scholarship (3)
Denomination/Faith, Service (2)
Documenting Past Performance

“No single publication of a library can do more to enhance its reputation and increase its budget than its annual report.”
Mersky (1983), Staines (2009)

- Staines study found a decline in annual reports and a rise in strategic plans in academic libraries
- Public relations piece, brief reviews of current issues and need for additional resources, present historical information, and share future plans
- Used internally and externally for stakeholders
Methodology: Documenting Past Performance

• Annual reports, assessment
• How are they publicized (to stakeholders, internal documents)?
• Library annual report is usually condensed with good information lost; make available and usable
"Are academic libraries presenting their mission statements online? How much worth is assigned through this communication?"

Triveni Kuchi, “Communicating Mission”

• Study looked at 111 ARL library websites, examined for presence and location of mission statements
• 78% of these academic libraries had a mission statement on their websites, although most were through indirect links ("locations were far from effective")
Methodology: Accessibility of mission statements

• Does the location of the mission statement on the website signify how much value the department placed on it?

• Judged the position and access to mission statements on each website
  o Counted number of “clicks” from main webpage
  o Looked at where mission statements were located
  o If not directly linked, we explored where it existed
Prominence of Special Collections/Archives

39% of libraries directly linked to Special Collections/Archives from their main page
Prominence of mission statement

Only 1 institution directly stated their missions on their main pages
And the rest of Special Collections mission statements?

- **58%** • Within 1 click from the Archives main page
- **18%** • Within 2 clicks of the Archives main page
- **18%** • Within 3 clicks from the Archives main page
Strategic Credibility Summary

- **Demonstrated performance**
  - 59% of Alliance Special Collections/Archives do not have easily accessible mission statements online

- **Capability to strategize**
  - Of those with mission statements, many are indirectly linked on the website

- **Communication to stakeholders**
  - Most state WHAT they do (preserve) but not WHY (for learning, research)
We know – mission statements aren’t everything – but it’s a good start.

Portland State University

- “Students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to utilize this rich collection in their scholarly and creative work.”
- “...promote learning and discovery and to advance research and scholarship.”

University of Oregon

- “Our diverse collections support all types of research, from K-12 education to international scholarship.”
- “We strive to play an active and creative role in the teaching, research, and serve missions of the University.”
Other types of value communicated through Special Collections/Archives websites

<table>
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<th>Mission/Support Features</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oregon Institute for Technology</td>
<td>Library mission running along bottom of all web pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Oregon</td>
<td>Special Collections and Curriculum Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Washington University</td>
<td>Clearly displayed mission statements for each department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willamette University</td>
<td>Instructional service webpage</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Recomendations

• Process of reflection is worthwhile
• (Re)Develop
• (Re)Align
• (Re)Deploy your mission


