

The Library as American University's Intellectual Hub

Strategic Plan 2006-2011

Academic libraries offer unique expertise and resources that are essential to achieving the goals and advancing the mission of institutions of higher learning. With the emergence of new information technologies, libraries are successfully re-conceptualizing the ways in which they provide students and faculty with access to resource materials. Yet technology is not the only domain in which libraries must evolve to best serve their constituencies. Libraries must also periodically reconsider their role within their institutional context.

In spring 2005, the American University Library undertook a major planning initiative to develop a five-year strategic plan. One center-piece of this process was Symposium 2010, which brought together local and national experts from higher education, university libraries, information technology, publishing, and the computer game industry to define how academic libraries can best meet the needs of learners and scholars in the twenty-first century.

A central theme emerging from Symposium 2010 is the vision of an academic library as a source of intellectual coherence for the university. The present strategic plan builds on this vision.

I. The Library as American University's Intellectual Hub

American University is a vibrant community of teachers and learners, composed of academic units and university-wide programs that support an impressive array of opportunities for pedagogy and research. However, the very diversity of offerings presents a challenge of coherence for students and faculty alike.

To help meet this challenge, the American University Library will evolve to become the intellectual hub of the campus community. This role entails forging partnerships with constituencies throughout the larger academic enterprise, while building upon the library's existing expertise and resources. As specialists in information gathering, retrieval, and management, the library is uniquely suited to serve this role. Moreover, as the campus's central repository of academic learning, the library is naturally positioned to expand its mission from serving those who seek information to reaching out to other intellectual centers on campus.

To realize this vision, the library will concentrate on four goals:

1. Facilitating research, inquiry, learning, and creativity for all students, faculty, and staff
2. Creating a physical and virtual intellectual crossroads on campus
3. Building liaisons with constituencies throughout the university
4. Incorporating and utilizing the best of emerging information technology

II. Strategies for Achieving Goals

1. Facilitating Research, Inquiry, Learning, and Creativity for Students, Faculty, and Staff

- **The library will become an indispensable curricular partner with teaching faculty to advance institutional goals.** It will develop seamless integration of library resources into Blackboard and other curriculum resources. It will enhance information literacy programs that are directly applicable to students' scholarly pursuits at AU as well as positioning them for successful life-long learning in an environment of ever-changing information technology.
- **The library will enhance access to scholarly works.** Enhancements may include, for example, digitizing unique special collections and creating new venues for sharing research such as an institutional repository. The library will build on its strong campus outreach program to promote knowledge of the available information resources.
- **The library will provide technology and space to facilitate new ways of using and creating knowledge.** It will develop a centralized, interdisciplinary learning commons within the library that integrates technology, information resources, and media expertise. The commons will include platforms for individual creation of information such as self-service multi-media work areas.

2. Creating a Physical and Virtual Intellectual Crossroads on Campus

- **The library will be a gathering place for intellectual discovery by learners and scholars.** It will utilize existing spaces to partner with student and faculty groups for intellectually stimulating programs and cultural or civic events. It will create distinctive, inviting areas that respond to a variety of learning styles, including areas for comfortable reading and group discussion. Service points will be realigned or consolidated to achieve more flexible and responsive customer service, either on site or virtually. To further these goals, it will continue to work with campus constituencies to augment library space.
- **The library will become a primary resource for issues concerning use of intellectual property, privacy, and intellectual freedom,** working in concert with the Washington College of Law and the University's General Counsel.

3. Building Liaisons with Constituencies throughout the University

- **The library will partner with academic programs and centers to support library and institutional goals.** These partnerships may involve, for example, co-sponsoring events, supporting research or teaching initiatives, or collaboratively enhancing collection development. Liaison opportunities could include individual academic departments, the University College, the General Education Program, the University Honors Program, the Center for Teaching Excellence, AU Abroad, and the Washington Semester Program.

- **The library will create and work closely with a cadre of faculty who will participate in collection development and serve as emissaries for disseminating the activities and resources of the library to academic departments.**
- **The library will enhance its pro-active work with students by collaborating with such constituencies as student government, student publications, foreign language clubs, or residence halls to assess student needs and provide support for their academic activities.**

4. Incorporating and Utilizing the Best of Emerging Information Technology

- **The library will reduce time and space barriers to learning and research.** The library will emphasize the purchase of digital and electronic materials, while continuing to build its print collections. Students and researchers will have expanded off-site access to library materials and expertise, as close to 24/7 as feasible. Part of this initiative will entail configuring resources to be available on state-of-the-art mobile and portable devices. Working with AU Abroad and with academic departments, the library will develop new mechanisms for supporting international study abroad and distance education initiatives, including online reference help and access to electronic and print materials.
- **The library will improve management and delivery systems to provide fast and reliable access to information.** Management of print collections will be enhanced with collection assessment software. The library will acquire or develop new finding aids and search engines incorporating new technologies, making them available to searchers wherever they reside. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) will be assessed as a possible tool for inventory and location of materials.

III. Ahead to 2011

As the face of pedagogy, research, and technology changes, an academic library must do more than keep pace. American University Library is committed to positioning itself as a welcoming and accessible repository of information and as an integral part of the university's broad intellectual enterprise. The library looks forward to engaging with the university community as an integrative hub for enhancing academic excellence.