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The University of Houston is poised at the precipice of great change. The Tier One referendum has been passed by the voters of Texas. The University of Houston has been confirmed as a leader among the Texas Emerging Research Universities and has established its strategic plan to achieve the goal of Tier One designation.

This document positions the Libraries to respond to the new and complex challenges that lie ahead. It is an ambitious and bold blueprint which positions the Libraries as a foundational element of the drive to establish and maintain the high level of excellence which defines a Tier One university.

University libraries are at the strategic center of the mission of a university. They are there to support knowledge creation and inception, they provide access to and dissemination of that knowledge for learning, and they are the guardians of past knowledge for the enlightenment of future generations.

The University of Houston Libraries Strategic Directions Plan for 2010-2013 reaffirms the commitment of the University of Houston librarians and staff to advancing the Tier One goals of the University.

I look forward to the “exciting organizational conversation” initiated by the outstanding work of the 2010 Strategic Directions Steering Committee and to the creative and entrepreneurial initiatives that will be developed by our librarians and staff not only to achieve, but exceed, expectations over the next three years.

Sincerely,

Dana C. Rooks
Dean of Libraries
Elizabeth D. Rockwell Chair
The next three years hold the promise of great opportunities for the University of Houston Libraries. Building on the outstanding accomplishments inspired by the “UH Libraries Strategic Directions, 2006-2010,” and supporting the ambitious plans for the University of Houston to attain Tier One national research university status, the “UH Libraries Strategic Directions, 2010-2013” seek to continue an exciting organizational conversation focused on working together to meet the needs of our users and the goals of our campus community.

What are Strategic Directions?

Strategic directions are aspirational, open-ended, visionary statements intended to inspire creative responses at all levels of the organization. Based on input from a variety of sources, both within and outside of the organization, they are intentionally broad and far-reaching, rather than narrowly prescriptive. Transforming strategic directions into concrete projects with measurable outcomes is the responsibility of all members of the organization.

Building on Success

The previous strategic directions document resulted in many successful projects. Among the significant accomplishments it fostered is the Learning Commons, a key component of the goal of “becoming an integrated teaching and learning center,” which has become one of the Libraries’ most popular services. Additionally, the Libraries’ virtual presence has been significantly enhanced by the recent launch of a new library website, the development of in-depth research guides, and the creation of nationally recognized mobile technology applications. The Rebrand the Libraries direction led directly to the founding of the award-winning UH Libraries Marketing Committee and the creation of the UH Libraries’ eye-catching logo. In addition, major steps have been taken to support scholarly communication, another direction found in the 2006-2010 document, with the establishment of the Head of Digital Projects position and the debut of several highly publicized collections of historic images.

Striving for Tier One

As the University of Houston takes steps to achieve Tier One status and attain recognition as a national research university, the University of Houston Libraries are firmly committed to aligning their work with the University’s six strategic goals, adopted by the Board of Regents in May 2008:

- National Competitiveness
- Student Success
- Community Advancement
- Athletic Competitiveness
- National and Local Recognition
- Resource Competitiveness
The University of Houston Libraries will promote the innovation and excellence that define a Tier One institution by adopting four strategic directions to guide the Libraries’ work for the next three years:

- Supporting Research and Scholarly Productivity
- Building Dynamic Partnerships
- Fostering Academic Success through Innovative Services
- Enhancing User Experience through Technology

Implementation and Assessment

The “UH Libraries Strategic Directions, 2010-2013” will provide the inspiration and foundation for a variety of projects and initiatives. UH Libraries staff will find opportunities for action in the Strategic Directions Microgrant Program, departmental initiatives, research projects, and other ventures.

A strong commitment to assessment will enable us to evaluate the efficacy of Directions-inspired initiatives. Assessment, which should be incorporated into all projects from their earliest stages, will take many forms, including analyzing internal data, soliciting feedback from stakeholders, surveying users, and conducting interviews and focus groups.

**Strategic Directions Microgrant Program:** For the past three years, the UH Libraries have supported an annual in-house small grants program to encourage entrepreneurial initiatives based on the “UH Libraries Strategic Directions, 2006-2010.” Individuals and groups of librarians and staff members can apply for amounts up to $2000 to support projects that advance the Libraries’ progress toward any of the directions, and the program has sponsored many highly successful endeavors. The Libraries will continue the Microgrant Program in support of the “UH Libraries Strategic Directions, 2010-2013.”
RESEARCH SUPPORT
Supporting Research and Scholarly Productivity
Direction

The University of Houston Libraries will fully support the University’s mandate to sustain a high level of research and scholarly productivity, a key element in its efforts to attain Tier One status.

The Libraries’ response to Tier One initiatives includes supporting new faculty, expanded doctoral programs, and emerging areas of research. Effective support will take many forms: ongoing development of relevant and comprehensive collections; exceptional librarian and staff knowledge of current issues in research and scholarship; and customized, interdisciplinary services to aid scholarly inquiry from initial concept to final dissemination. Library staff deployment will align with the research priorities of the University, adding technical skills and new levels of disciplinary expertise as needed to offer the best service possible to faculty and other researchers.

Context

The University of Houston’s “Plan to Achieve Recognition as a National Research University” states:

“On quality measures such as research, publications, scholarly citations and national academy members, the University of Houston is already well on its way to national excellence. But to achieve the level of success to which the University aspires will require much more.”

Major initiatives are underway in energy- and health-related fields, as well as the arts. The number of interdisciplinary research efforts and partnerships in international centers is growing, offering exciting new opportunities for the UH Libraries to address the particular research needs of these groups.

Across the nation library collections and services are tools for recruiting top faculty and graduate students. Research libraries are partnering with their institutions to offer support in emerging areas of need, such as data preservation and compliance with federal data access mandates, and are thus demonstrating in new ways their centrality to the core missions of their universities.
COLLABORATION

Building Dynamic Partnerships
Direction

By forming strong collaborative relationships with faculty members, other campus units, and partners beyond the campus, University of Houston Libraries will become fully integrated into the teaching, learning, and research activities of the University.

The creation of rich partnerships directly supports several of the Tier One goals, including national competitiveness, student success, and community advancement. With respect to student success, for example, librarians and library staff will work closely with faculty members and other campus service providers to become seamlessly integrated into students’ learning experience both in the classroom and online. New opportunities to partner with groups outside of UH are emerging: by working with local K-12 schools we can assist in preparing future college students; by connecting with local civic and arts organizations we can become a potential home for their archives; and by investigating further opportunities with inter-library partnerships we can maximize access to library collections.

Context

The theme of partnerships or collaboration is a major trend in all types of libraries today and emerged in several contexts during the development of the Strategic Directions. In the committee’s SWOT analysis, strengths of the UH Libraries included “personal relationships (with faculty and students)” and a “collaborative culture.” Also, “campus initiatives we can align with” was identified as an opportunity.

These same themes were brought to the surface in focus groups with library staff, in which many participants indicated that they would like to see more collaboration between the libraries and colleges and other units, collaboration with faculty to improve instruction, and more collaborative spaces within the Libraries’ facilities.

Lastly, in a statement that encapsulates a trend discussed in many similar reports, the ACRL report entitled “Changing Roles of Academic and Research Libraries” argued that “[l]ibrary staff must regard themselves as partners with faculty, offering tools and expertise that in many cases differ from what faculty members themselves possess. The working relationship between faculty and library staff must be one of conjoining complementary strengths to produce a result that neither partner could attain alone.”
SERVICES

Fostering Academic Success through Innovative Services
Direction

The University of Houston Libraries will implement innovative services that foster student and faculty academic success and enhance access to information.

The UH Libraries currently provide users with a broad array of valuable services and the organization is widely known for its exceptional ethic of service. From this position of strength, the Libraries will focus on developing new services that have a direct and substantial impact on academic success. These include integrated service points that offer “one-stop shops” within the Libraries’ facilities, user-centered online access portals, expanded options for faculty seeking library instruction for students, special programs and events for researchers, and outreach to student and faculty groups.

In addition to creating exciting new services that directly benefit students and faculty, the Libraries will focus on organizational goals such as expanded opportunities for staff training and a commitment to respond nimbly and creatively to user needs. These efforts will enhance the Libraries’ reputation for excellent service and enable the Libraries to become the information source of choice for all members of the University community.

Context

Our environmental scan confirms that libraries no longer corner the market on information services as faculty and students have easy access to a great bounty of information 24/7. Indeed, according to a current CLIR publication, “the information landscape of early twenty-first century higher education is characterized by ubiquitous, digitized, indexed online access to content.” Social networking and mobile devices allow users to obtain and share information instantaneously. Web-based, as well as “brick-and-mortar,” information suppliers compete for our users’ attention and expectations of library services are higher than ever before.

These developments require a transformation of library services for a new era. Libraries must provide new value added services, both online and face-to-face, that meet the specific needs of their users. As a research library, we have an edge: we are in a unique position to identify and address our community’s needs through our commitment to and alignment with institutional goals.
Direction

The University of Houston Libraries will seek out, develop, and utilize cutting-edge technology to provide powerful computing services, streamlined information access, and high quality training opportunities to all users.

We will focus in particular on creating an environment that encourages experimentation with innovative new technology and resources. Library staff will discover inventive new ways to deliver service by evaluating emerging technologies and soliciting input regarding user needs and perceptions. Mobile access options will be a top priority as our users increasingly favor handheld devices and equipment. Ongoing technology training for UH Libraries staff and users will enable both groups to maximize the benefits of technology.

As a nearly ubiquitous component of the Libraries’ services and resources, technology also plays a vital role in the preceding three strategic directions, and it will support scholarly activity, collaborative partnerships, and innovative services. Both within and beyond these areas of focus, the Libraries’ technological initiatives will strive to enhance the user experience and respond to user needs through a robust program of assessment and analysis.

Context

In the Committee’s user survey, 72.2% of respondents indicated that technology in the library was one of their highest priorities. When invited to elaborate on their responses, they offered comments that fell into four key areas: powerful computing resources, widely available and accessible technology, intuitive-to-use technology and equipment, and more reliable technology overall.

As the University advances toward Tier One status, the Libraries will play a crucial role in many initiatives by providing its users with unparalleled opportunities for academic exploration and excellence through access to information in all forms. Because of technology’s importance to both these strategic directions and our users, we will adapt and embrace new technologies whenever they will contribute to an improved user experience.

User Experience (UX):

We seek to provide a holistic user experience--anytime and anywhere--that is effective, efficient and satisfying. We will explore, adapt, and embrace technological innovation in order to craft such a versatile, yet resilient, user experience.
Gathering the Information

In February 2010, the Strategic Directions Steering Committee was charged with developing a new set of strategic directions for the period of September 2010-August 2013 that would not only build upon the 2006-2010 Library Strategic Directions document, but also be forward-thinking and reflect the University’s priorities in the push towards Tier One status. Additionally, the Committee was asked to create these directions through significant and wide-spread engagement of librarians and staff. The directions will provide guidance on how best to position the Libraries in order to achieve the mandatory resources, services, and operations reflective of a Tier One university research library.

The Committee began seriously to engage members of the library during the first set of focus groups. It was decided that the focus groups at this stage would be comprised of members of similar job responsibilities within the library (student workers, support staff, support staff supervisors, librarians, department heads, and administration). While each focus group was slightly tailored to meet the needs of the group, all focus groups were given a series of focused questions regarding the future of libraries and regarding the Libraries’ role in the University’s Tier One goals.

Analyzing the Data

After the information gathering phase, the Committee set about analyzing the data. To compile the raw data, the Committee found it convenient to use a Google doc spreadsheet, which allowed for members to tag and sort the information in real-time. The Committee found 9 initial trends, or directions, from the data. To refine the list further, the Committee held an open forum for all members of the library to attend and submit feedback.

During this time, the Committee also gathered data from sources outside of the UH Libraries. An online survey sent out to UH faculty, staff, and students was vital in helping the Committee to understand what our core users were looking for in a Tier One research library. Data gathered from the Committee’s environmental scan, literature review, and SWOT analysis were also taken into consideration.

After hosting a second specialized focus group with key stakeholders and internal committee deliberations, it became clear that the four directions that the UH Libraries should emphasize are Research Support, Dynamic Partnerships, Services, and Technology. However, these directions should be the start of a process and the beginning of an organizational conversation, and each direction must be combined with continual assessment in order to be successful.

Communication

The Committee felt that it was of the utmost importance for its work to be as transparent as possible. An intranet page with the raw data, document drafts, and other communications was created so that any member of the library was able to view, comment, and question the Committee at any time during the six month creation phase.

Throughout the process, the Committee met face-to-face every two weeks. Between meetings, the Committee communicated virtually through Basecamp, a project management tool. As with the previous Strategic Directions Steering Committee, the 2010-2013 Strategic Directions Steering Committee used a private Flickr account to mount photos of flipcharts and dry-erase board diagrams that could then be viewed at any time.
Committee Members
Rosalind Alexander
Shawn Anderson
Miranda Bennett (chair)
Katie Buehner
Kelli Getz (chair)
Nancy Linden
Nate McKee
Marilyn Myers
Annie Wu

Charge
The charge to the Steering Committee is as follows:

• Develop a plan for the Library Strategic Directions for a three-year period, September, 2010 through August, 2013.
• The Plan should build on the current Library Strategic Directions, be aspirational and position the Libraries to achieve the mandatory resources, services, and operations reflective of a Tier One university research library.
• It should reflect the University’s top priorities, commonly referred to as “The Rocks,” and position the Libraries as a contributor to these priorities.
• Significant and widespread engagement of librarians and staff should be fundamental to the recommendations developed.
• The Steering Committee should produce a plan for wide distribution to the University community and beyond.
• Completion of the report is expected by August 31, 2010.


