It is something we do everyday, whether we acknowledge we are doing it or not. We make value judgments. Each of us manages daily a defined pool of resources: money, time, or perhaps most precious, our attention. Our days are filled with small but significant decisions that define the value of the things in our lives—services, tools, places, people. Increasingly it seems more and more things are competing for these scarce resources. The value judgments we make therefore carry more importance now than they ever did. The things in which we place value change as we change, and evolve as our needs evolve. This is true both on a personal level as we progress through the timeline of life, but also as a society and culture as we continually grow and adapt to the world around us. Progress, innovation, and change do happen and this is a good thing. That these things change and affect our value judgments is not inherently a good or a bad thing. Yet somewhere we must take stock of where those judgments lie, not only for ourselves, but also for those we serve.

The topic of value has been in the national discussion of information service this past year. The Association of College and Research Libraries issued a report looking at how value is defined for academic libraries. It includes a call for libraries to better understand and articulate value in the future. OCLC also released an update to their Perceptions Report which looks at how users of all types of libraries value and perceive the services they provide. In a similar vein, Inside Higher Ed...
Year in Review: The Value of Information Service

published a survey of college and university presidents on their perspectives of the value delivered by information technology to their campuses. These are a few of the broad professional studies touching on the topic of value in information service. Locally, we have also been a participant in the MISO (Merged Information Services Organization) survey which gives us a picture of the value our local community places on our services.

I’ll put it bluntly: the times are changing. The perceived value of libraries is clearly declining across these studies. Historically, libraries were the only place to go for information. No one individual could afford to collect the resources a library held. Therefore they held significant shared value. Today, the Internet has fundamentally changed this equation. The very thing that most people valued about the library — access to information — can now be found elsewhere at a seemingly lower cost.

It is somewhat paradoxical that in today's age of technology innovation, information technology organizations are facing similar challenges. It is true that any organization of significant size cannot function without technology infrastructure today. Just walk around a modern workplace during a power outage and note the dazed looks on faces. In most places, business processes are digital and rely on a wide range of tools to function. Leaders, and in our sector, college and university presidents, however, are not certain of the value delivered by all this infrastructure. The costs of providing IT are in some ways divorced from the business processes they support. The fact that technology operations remain a somewhat mystical and unknown science to many in leadership positions exacerbates the problem. There is a trend in many areas of IT to de-emphasize the technology organization itself and instead infuse it within the other business operating units. I think this is a good direction as it better paints the picture of how technology delivers value in the real world. The rise of cloud and virtual computing also is disruptive to technology support in the same way the Internet was to libraries. There is no longer a strong business case for much local IT infrastructure as servers in the cloud are cheaper, and often more reliable. As personal devices go more mobile, and everything is network-based, the role of organizational IT changes significantly. The value of our local infrastructure (or collections in the library case) is lesser. Are our IT organizations known for delivering value in other areas such as training, integration, and user service?

Our first hurdle to overcome is the often distorted view of value that we who work within the information profession have about our services. Our problem is no different than anyone else’s. We have chosen to make a profession providing library and information technology service, and so, of course, we find value in what we do. To be fair the studies above do not say that library and technology services are not valued — they are. However, the things that are valued about our services are not the things that we are in the best position to deliver in the future. So our second hurdle is to rethink and rebrand library and information service in the minds of our users. Focusing on the primacy of our personal relationships with users, we need to double down on our literacy and training initiatives (the need for this is greater than ever even if people do not really realize it). This also involves working to de-emphasize portions of our service that have long been at the forefront. We need to fundamentally question all assumptions about how we do what we do. Such exercises can be difficult and scary, though they do not have to be. What we do — providing resources and expertise to support the academic mission of our host institution — has not changed at all. Pretty much everything about how we do that has and should change. We need to hold fast to what we do, and jeetison as much legacy “hows” as we can. Keeping this perspective helps maintain focus and allows true change to happen. For if one thing is certain, if how we do what we do does not change significantly in the coming years, we will no longer be relevant to anyone but ourselves. This is particularly challenging in higher education where many of our constituents will not press us to change. We need to have the vision and courage to go where we know we need to be in the future.

I have read and heard arguments that the solution to the value question lies in a better articulation of the services we provide. I think this is true, but that it should not be our focus. The assumption in that argument is that our services are worth the message. However, if you have to convince people that your service or product is better than others through marketing, then you’ve already lost the war. What I believe is much more effective is designing and delivering such high quality, useful, and innovative services that users instantly recognize the value and seek it out.

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Newsbits from 2010-11

LIS Web Refreshed
The LIS website received a facelift this year to match the new Luther web template which debuted in fall 2010. Work is ongoing to migrate the LIS website to Reenon, our new campus content management system. Work will be complete on that project in the coming academic year.

Mobile Web Services Unveiled
Luther launched m.luther.edu as a mobile site this year offering mobile-optimized services to a variety of campus services including maps, a campus tour, calendars, realtime computer lab availability, and a live Caf Cam showing cafeteria lines.

Vision for Library Spaces Prepared
A team within LIS has worked to prepare a long-range vision for Press Library facilities as we anticipate a transition from physical to virtual collections and continue to improve the collaborative features of the building. This work included gathering campus feedback and has resulted in some changes already being made.

Ideas.luther.edu Launched
The Luther community now has an electronic ideas website to both gather and assess ideas. LIS first launched this service inviting comment from the community and assess ideas. LIS first launched this service in fall 2010. The LIS website now has written service level agreements with all academic departments that detail expectations and support provided. We will continue to meet regularly with academic departments to update and refresh these agreements.

Digital Document System Planned
Morsde Arrives: KATIE & Norse Apps
Our primary new collaborative venture on top of the new network. Morsde brings integration between the two services thanks to Morsle. Morsle now enjoy close integration between the LIS Metronet, became a formal consortium this year and is prepared to bid construction of our Decorah fiber network. Work continues on building use cases and additional collaborative ventures on top of the new network.

Podcasting Solution Installed
A server dedicated to podcasting has been implemented allowing for the ability to capture lectures and seamlessly publish the content to any specified course / courses in KATIE. The Podcast Server has also given us the capability of streaming live events across campus.

Duplicate Serials Eliminated
Librarians have worked to eliminate duplication of serials received in both print and electronic format resulting in additional budget savings. This transition from print to digital continues to expand and we anticipate additional reductions in the coming academic year.

Digital Signage Expanded
Digital signs were installed in the Cafeteria, Regents Center, Library, Caffeine, and Hall of Science. These were heavily used for our annual Paideia instruction activities.

Research Help “On-the-Move”
Librarians expanded research help services this year by offering regular research assistance hours outside the library building at a number of other campus locations including the Center for the Arts, Union, Koren, Valders, Legends, and the Diversity Center.

ResLife/Conference Software Acquired
New hosted software for our residential life and conference services was acquired and will provide enhanced capability in management of our residential spaces.

Weekend/Evening Staffing Expanded
LIS has hired a new Public Services Specialist Jennifer Sell to provide building oversight and supervision on Saturday and some evenings during the academic year. She will also help support other LIS initiatives as time allows.

Innovative Services Librarian Hired
After a competitive search, LIS hired Jennifer Rian to serve as Innovative Services Librarian beginning in August 2011. Jennifer will work to develop a plan to advance the scope, quality, and reach of our services during her first year at Luther.

Course Guides Migrated
Our library research guides migrated to a new hosted service offering expanded functionality. They are now available at http://lisguides.luther.edu. These were heavily used for our annual Paideia instruction activities.

Journeys to America” Launched
Our NHPRC-funded grant project Journeys to America launched with the hiring of our project archivist Sashia Grif- fin. Work has been underway to build and prepare the digital infrastructure needed to support the project going forward.

Decorah Metronet Advances
This year to match the new Luther web template which debuted in fall 2010. Work is ongoing to migrate the LIS website to Reenon, our new campus content management system.

Service Level Agreements Completed
LIS now has written service level agreements with all academic departments that detail expectations and support provided. We will continue to meet regularly with academic departments to update and refresh these agreements.

Digital Document System Planned
Morsde Arrives: KATIE & Norse Apps
Users of KATIE and Norse Apps can now enjoy close integration between the two services thanks to Morsde. Morsde provides Norse Groups, Calendars, and Documents integration with our course management system.

Digital Document System Planned
LIS now has written service level agreements with all academic departments that detail expectations and support provided. We will continue to meet regularly with academic departments to update and refresh these agreements.

Data Reporting Capabilities Enhanced
Over ninety custom views have been created in Datatel’s ODS to facilitate reporting via Microsoft Excel and Access, and SRSRS (Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services). We have developed the foundation for end user self reporting using SRSRS by creating security and navigation structures as well as basic data models.

Funding Secured for Datatel MSSQL
We have dedicated funds to upgrade our underlying Datatel database to Microsoft SQL server in the 2011-12 academic year. This will provide enhanced capability and security.

Materials Acquisition “Just-In-Time”
We have begun to purchase some library materials “just-in-time” based on interlibrary loan requests and other criteria. This will improve the use and relevance of collections for users as we seek to expand this initiative in the coming year.

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Digital Signage Expanded
Digital signs were installed in the Cafeteria, Regents Center, Library, Career Center, Olin, and Valders. These signs now display a standard Luther template with customized content for each specific campus location.

LIS Service Point Collaboration
Work continues to thoughtfully consider how LIS service points work together in supporting the campus and delivering on the mission of LIS. Integration of student training will continue to be assessed and improved as appropriate.

$444,607
processed through our online ecommerce system

140Mbps
Internet bandwidth serving the Luther community

$104,787
spent to provide Internet service

2,161
books borrowed via Interlibrary Loan

1,941
queries to the Research Help Desk
Predictive and Guiding Vision for Library and Information Service - Luther College - June 2011

INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

- Geographic consolidation of information professionals in more collaborative work environments will remain a priority.
- Information professionals will increasingly locate and originate services from embedded positions within functional work teams.
- Information professionals will increasingly wrestle to serve a wide diversity of user skillsets and worldviews regarding information services.
- Information professionals will increasingly focus on relationships with constituents and increasingly defocus on collections/infrastructure in daily activities.

INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

- There will be an increased expectation for flexible and broad skillsets.
- Information professionals will increasingly focus on tasks to add local value to broad services.
- Comfort with and acclimation to change and evolution of information service will remain a priority.
- Information professionals in higher education will increasingly navigate disruptions in our service and business models in our field and our sector.
- Information support personnel will increasingly focus on public service and information fluency.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

- Collaborative partnerships for acquisition of information resources will rise in priority and importance.
- Physical research collections will shrink over time focusing on the "classics" and core titles.
- Large packaged digital collections (monographic and serialistic) will increasingly form the backbone of academic research collections.
- The focus of Library and Archives curation and collection operations will increasingly focus on digital content management, with emphasis on local unique materials.

INFORMATION SERVICES

- The Internet will be the primary method of delivery for multimedia content.
- Users will continue to quickly adopt ebooks and ereaders.
- The importance of metrics and assessment of resource use (particularly in-facility physical and virtual use) will increase.
- Storage of research materials will not be seen as a significant priority for library space.
- Discovery tools and services will expand to encompass much broader collections of materials and increasingly move to the cloud.

We will move rapidly toward virtually-based infrastructure (cloud computing).

Open source, cloud-based enterprise systems will emerge as viable alternatives to current vendor systems.

Redundancy and availability will be benchmarks of infrastructure service.

Voice communications will migrate to data networks with unified messaging.

Data networks will expand to a large number of devices over next-generation IPv6 networks.

Ubiquitous wireless network services will become the primary form of connectivity.

We continue to see movement toward more collaborative, active, and engaging physical spaces in libraries.

We are experiencing a rapid migration to mobile devices for employees and students.

Classroom/lab infrastructure will be reduced.

There will be increasing opportunity and reason to form collaborative partnerships for information infrastructure.

Collaborative partnerships for information service will expand in priority and importance.

Christopher Barth - 19 May 2011