The Role of Systems Librarian for Establishing and Developing A New Academic and Research Library

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Outline

Introduction of KAUST library
Concept review
Evolution of library automation
Present scenario of library technology
The roles of the system librarian
Challenges and lessons
Conclusion
Opened in August 2009, started from scratch:

- only about 10 library staff members;
- The collection development just start;
- The ILS just installed and waited for implementing;
- the bibliographic database and patron’s database were empty, etc.

See the pictures of today’s KAUST library:
Introduction of KAUST library

Current situation after 14 months development:

§ organization structure has completed formed with three units and 25 staff members;

§ 10,000 print books, 70,000 e-books, and 10,000 online journal subscriptions

§ ILS functions well in all the core tasks, multifunction and one-stop search interface for library online catalogue
Concept review

What is a systems librarian?

- A systems librarian is a librarian who is responsible for managing the information technology used in a library.
- The systems librarian's mission is to work with constantly changing technology.
- The systems librarian is the middleman, the go-between of the supplier and user: priest-like
- systems librarianship is the art and science of combining the principles of librarianship with the abilities of computing technology
## Evolution of library automation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Evidence in Libraries</th>
<th>Effect on Systems Librarian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Typewriters, Adding machines</td>
<td>Not yet in existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Mainframe and minicomputer technology, Function-specific separate automated library systems, Emphasis on automating technical tasks, Offline batch-processing systems, Online time-sharing systems late in stage</td>
<td>A few emerge, Managed technical issues for in-house development and implementation projects, Worked for bibliographic utilities, vendors, or large libraries</td>
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<td>Three</td>
<td>Integrated online library systems available from vendors, The online public access catalog is born, Microcomputers appear and begin proliferating</td>
<td>More appear, Hired to manage integrated library system implementation, Often also head of technical services or head of circulation, Support of library staff main focus, Systems department created late in stage, Microcomputer coordination duties added late in stage, Reports to technical services</td>
</tr>
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<td>Four</td>
<td>Local, national, and international networking develops, TCP/IP and VT100 terminals become de facto standards, National and international standards allow increased collaboration, Server technologies replace mainframes and minicomputers, The central computing environment becomes a distributed, client-server environment</td>
<td>Begins to directly support patrons, Becomes colleague of campus computing departments, Involved in local, state, regional, national collaborative projects, Knowledgeable about computing hardware, software, and networking used outside the library, More involved in administrative tasks, Systems staff increases in number, Becomes generalist while staff in office or library become specialists, Reports to director</td>
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<td>Five</td>
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Note: this figure comes from research paper Networking and the role of the academic systems librarian: an evolutionary perspective (Lavagnino, M. B. (1997), page 3.)
Present scenario of library technology

- Second level
  - Third level
    - Fourth level
      - Fifth level
The roles of the system librarian for establishing a new academic library systems implementation, maintaining, upgrading server and host administration "tweaking"/customizing software training, documentation, and support application development planning and budgeting specification and purchasing technology exploration and evaluation miscellaneous technology support technical risk management communication and coordination consulting on technology perusing and usage in library
The roles of the system librarian for establishing a new academic library

As an organizer:
- Organization and delegation of responsibilities are crucial for a new library.
- Systems librarian need to take the initiative action.
- Work with all the units to analyze workflow, and identify the tasks and assign each task to specific staff members.
- Strengthen training and monitoring.
The roles of the system librarian for establishing a new academic library

As a connector from linear connections to nebular networks
The roles of the system librarian for establishing a new academic library

As an interpreter

An interpreter should be like a duck: Above the surface look calm and unruffled. . .

Below the surface, paddle like hell!!
"How to interpret “the systems librarian is …priest-like interpreter”?

“since ‘missionary’ is defined as doing religious work (priest also means religion) so I don't know why systems librarian is like a priest.”– my daughter, a senior student of university
How to interpret “the systems librarian is ...priest-like interpreter”?

“When the system is full of mysteries (difficulties and not much technical helps), you need to interpret them in a divine way as a priest.

The users and workers of the system will be angry on you, when you try to priest too much in favor of a mysterious system.

Priest is a mediator, here you are a mediator between the system and its workers and users. When this mediation does not work perfectly, people will look for other churches!” – one of my colleague
My interpretation about “the systems librarian is ...priest-like interpreter”

Priest-like means doing interpretation work with a missionary approach. It is tedious, but if you do it with a passion, it has high professional worth.
Challenges and lessons

Build up smooth workflow according new architecture and high technology

Emphasis on efficient staff training

Build cooperation by communication

The work of systems librarian is art

- Be positive - Harmony
- Be flexible – Balance
- Be observing - Truth
- Be free – Beauty
Conclusion

In today’s library’s technology environment, a systems librarian plays multiple roles. Organization, training, connection, and interpretation are most important aspects for the establishing a new academic library. Intensive training, strong cooperation, and improvement of communication are important methods to deal with the many challenges involved. In some circumstance, the political effects also affect systems librarian’s works. A systems librarian not only deal with technique, but also practices the art of combination of science with librarianship.
Reference

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Questions

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