

Ubiquity Task Force Report

Purpose

This task force will explore the concept of ubiquity as it applies to the Libraries' presence within the OSU community. It could apply to such activities as teaching, research, and publishing, and in both the physical campus environment and the digital environment.

Membership

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Ubiquity Defined

Ubiquity is the universal and simultaneous physical, virtual, and perceived presence of the University Libraries, within and beyond the OSU community.

Value Statement

The OSU Academic Plan describes the goal to transform the Library into a 21st century Information Age center. A key facet of this is to create a ubiquitous presence among students, faculty, and staff through which the University Libraries provides the resources needed for teaching, research, learning and service.

As the proliferation of information resources has grown exponentially over the last several years, the need has grown to move the library beyond the confines of bricks and mortar. The library has evolved the methods that it uses to organize, create, and archive information.

The library as a ubiquitous organization will improve services, meeting and raising the expectations of our patrons. Our ubiquity will enrich relationships with our partners and patrons, enhancing their perception and the influence of our organization.

"Blue Sky" Vision

Ubiquity for the libraries involves providing the services that our patrons need in a relevant, timely, easy-to-use manner, regardless of their location. Blue Sky pictures are therefore likely to be service and resource specific. In researching ubiquity exemplars however, we found several recurring traits that were consistent to organizations with ubiquitous offerings. Several sound very familiar: Innovation, Collaboration, and Assessment. While we believe that we already have several of the

characteristics - Commitment to Quality & Consistency, Acceptance & Trust - we also found some that we could work on - Brand Recognition, Focused Offerings.

It is unrealistic to try to provide every possible service or resource for every single patron. We can as an organization act as the leaders of the university efforts to coordinate services and tools, to help all patrons understand what resources are available, where to find them, and how to use them. Those services and resources that do fall to us to provide should be of the absolute highest quality and should be the focus of what we do as a whole organization. We envision the OSU Libraries to be a hub, physically and digitally, that connects patrons to the resources that they need. We also recognize the importance of marketing all of these services so that patrons know that they are available and how they can further their goals.

In order to do this we need to strive to do what the libraries have always done: find, catalog and promote the resources that patrons need, promote them to users through a variety of media, instruct them in their use, and provide expertise and guidance in information science. We need to understand and support what each division is trying to accomplish and thereby be able to focus on the goals of the library as a single unit. The library should also recognize and respond to the different needs and perceptions of various academic and administrative programs so that it will be universally valued. We need to engage other parts of the university, our library peers and other public institutions to foster productive and lasting collaboration with them to understand what they are able to provide to our patrons and what we can provide to theirs.

Strategies

Ubiquity is a broad concept and should be measured with respect to the scope and audience of each project, service or resource. There are several strategies that could be used to help achieve the desired ubiquity: Culture, Promotion, and Collaboration.

There are several cultural ideals that are large in concept, but seem to be very successful in helping organizations achieve ubiquity. Successful organizations strive for continual improvement, are perceived as leaders in their respective fields, and maintain a user-centered focus. They each have a deep commitment to innovation and work to expand their offerings, aligned with their expertise. Many of the organizations realize that their constituents have differing service needs and make extra efforts to encourage personal-touch service in addition to self-service.

Promotion is key to a successful ubiquitous program. The best thought out and cleverly implemented service is worthless if no one knows of it. Carefully controlled branding is just as important as marketing and advertising. Branding provides a clear description and delineation of what a service is, most successfully with a very clear visual presence. Formal and informal methods are used to increase the visibility of an organization's offerings and to educate users in their scope: presence in orientation seminars, classes, advertising, and word of mouth. Informal promotion can be very effective when used by high-profile 'Rock Stars' in the organization: persons of renown in the university, in their profession, in specialized areas of study, or in their personal interests. This type of status can be encouraged by an administrative support of creativity.

Collaboration is a recurring theme, both external and internal to organizations. For the libraries this means partnerships among library departments, among campuses, with other academic and support units, with other schools, and with organizational and corporate partners. Each of these relationships multiplies the effectiveness of our team. For example, it is important that all staff who work closely with the public are well-educated in the services that are applicable and made aware of new services that are available. Subject Specialists are an excellent resource of collaboration with different departments because they are in constant communication with faculty and students. Outreach efforts are also a great way to cultivate relationships with our organization; look to the regional libraries to see great examples of how this can be done.

Programming

Brand Recognition - We need to define and enforce a OSUL brand consistent with a long term marketing plan to educate patrons about our current services and allow us to promote new services from within and abroad. There should be clear, convincing communication as to how and why we as an organization are to adhere to these guidelines at all times, and convenient and accessible help to implement them in an excellent fashion.

Library Communication - Our organization is filled with talented, driven and experienced people working on many interesting and diverse projects. We need to increase transparency and internal communications so that we can learn from each other's efforts, effectively promote our colleagues' work, and function as a cohesive unit towards the goals of OSUL. This will be important in discovering amongst ourselves how ubiquitous we already are in so many areas and allow us to better communicate that to our patrons in all of our dealings. To this end, we should develop a system for determining what responsibilities each department has.

Educational Materials - We believe that an easy way to promote the Libraries as a source for learning would be to promote and expand the current learning and outreach programs. This might include making programs like net.TUTOR more prominent, providing content from the Click It seminars, listing the most frequently asked reference questions (and how to answer them yourself), and producing a resource evaluation guide.

Exploration

The initial efforts that our group made were to develop an understanding of what ubiquity is and how it pertains to the University Libraries. We started with several dictionary definitions and spent some group time refining these definitions into one that applies to our situation. We felt that it was important to describe the venues-- physical, virtual and perceived.

Next, we examined why the initial group of thirty-five, and later the group of six, determined that the ubiquity of the Library was important to explore. We discussed:

- the shift in the way that patrons are using information
- that services are no longer concrete and no longer place-bound

- that patrons' expectations are higher and often unrealistic in terms of usage and copyright
- that educating users of the existence of services made available by the libraries is not a recent challenge.

While it was noted that in the latest Academic Plan document, the only reference to the libraries centered around the money contributed to the renovation of the Thompson Library, traditionally the primary physical presence on campus, we came to the conclusion that we are in many ways already ubiquitous, whether we have a well-perceived presence or not. The nature of our services makes us ubiquitous:

- the catalog (virtual)
- facilities across campus (physical)
- interlibrary loan (service)
- serving on non-library-related committees (personal).

Additional time was spent considering the benefits of the libraries being ubiquitous. While this centered most notably on increasing the image and renown of the OSU Libraries, with a direct correlation to an increase in the ability to further our mission, the team quickly identified benefits for patrons and the university as a whole. The OSU Academic Plan describes the goal to transform the Library into a 21st century Information Age center; being ubiquitous would further this goal by providing ready access to information and reserves. This would go hand-in-hand with making the libraries a complete source of information resources--Librarians can find what you need. The libraries have the potential to make the university more efficient, freeing up the resources of academic units to focus on their primary objectives, through the reduction of redundant information systems and resources that the library can and does provide. This parallels another university-wide service/support group, the Office of Information Technology, with whom further collaboration is envisioned.

We also sought to gain a greater appreciation for the regional campus libraries, how their needs differ, and their strategy for providing services to a smaller, more local patron-base with more limited resources. The regional librarians collaborate via a monthly meeting, which is usually held on the Columbus campus, and through serving on University Library committees. Their structures are unique, both within the library and with regards to their campuses (e.g. all the campuses are jointly OSU and a two-year technical college; Lima has two IT structures; Newark reaps the benefits of a single IT infrastructure). The regional librarians strive to personally engage new faculty, promote the resources of the whole OSU Libraries system, and prepare students to eventually attend college on the main campus, which many do.

In defining ubiquity, we realized that we needed to define the scope in which the libraries would be ubiquitous; this process included describing the different types of users that the OSUL currently works with. A large list of patrons and collaborators was developed, classified and categorized with respect to their being internal and

external to OSU. The list was finally generalized into four major categories of patrons that are prioritized by the University's academic plan:

- Students
- Instructors
- Researchers
- State & Public Patrons.

A catalog of OSUL resources and services was constructed. These items were deliberated and categorized in regards to their scope; contemplating whether they are ongoing vs. event based, resources vs. service and internal or external to OSUL.

In order to determine what recommendations could be made for improving ubiquity, we decided to examine several exemplars of ubiquity. We analyzed a variety of organizations within the OSU Libraries, within OSU, at outside the university. We specifically looked for common characteristics that they shared, barriers to their ubiquity and how they were overcome, changes that were noticed due to their ubiquitousness, and any apparent or suspected strategies the organizations had used to obtain and maintain their ubiquity. Throughout the process, we were interested in finding and evaluating scholarly discussions of the ubiquity of libraries, particularly academic ones. While we were able to find some materials, for the most part we were forced to draw our own conclusions on the benefits and methodologies.

Several meetings were spent brainstorming possible programming ideas, and they ended up going in just a few directions:

- brand recognition
- providing education materials and resources
- library communication

These can be of tremendous value in promoting the ubiquity of the Libraries.

Our "Blue Sky" Vision was distilled from a great deal of discussion, research and musings. It is a good solid message and 'blue skies' aside, a very achievable goal for our organization and will help to tie the findings of the different task forces together.

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