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Media Services in North American Academic Libraries

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Queens College
The City University of New York
New York, NY, USA

Meeting:

161 — "The media is the message!" The convergence of media in rapidly changing societies from a user perspective as well as the demand for preservation — Audiovisual and Multimedia Section with Preservation and Conservation

Abstract:

This presentation is aligned with the conference topic of, "the creation of educational media resource banks and associated services." It is an exploration of improving academic library multimedia services and will assist them in successfully supporting student/faculty integration of media into their teaching and learning products.

Ongoing evolution of the Benjamin S. Rosenthal (BRL), Multimedia Commons was initially informed by a report from an internal task force and also by a four-year-long study of North American academic library media services units. A travel grant allowed for visits to the media service units of Barnard College, College of Staten Island - City University of New York, Columbia University, Georgetown University, New York University, University of Maryland - College Park, University of Massachusetts – Amherst, University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, University of Texas – Austin. Visits have subsequently been made to the University of Washington – Seattle, Vassar College, and to Bibliotheque de l'Universite Laval.

This presentation will reveal the needs that surfaced during my visits and related research which command up-to-date standards, new best practices, and current skill sets that are essential to plan effective academic media facilities, staffing and services. Attention to these issues is critically important because academic faculty librarians rely upon service guidelines that were revised and published by the national library association in 2006 yet only address media services in broad, general strokes and do not provide a current comprehensive listing of what defines effectiveness across the media services domains listed above. Similarly, this presentation will attempt to fill a gap in the library science literature which offers few recent benchmarking or standards publications related to media services.

By investigating and reporting on current service standards, practices, inter-institutional relationships, and staffing skill sets, managers of academic library media services units and their other collaborating academic partners will better be able to understand the needs demanded of today's multimedia learning service units. All will better be able to support and collaborate and, most importantly, to provide effective services and support to students. Finally, managers of academic media services units will be able to fully understand, demonstrate, and advocate for appropriate levels of integration and support of the media services unit both within the academic library and across the parent institution.

As a case study, the presentation will also detail the development of the BRL Multimedia Commons which has been transformed with funding from the Queens College student technology fee program. Three successive years of funding awards have supported the transformation of a microforms storage area into an up-to-date multimedia collaboration space boasting viewing workstations, multimedia development collaboration spaces, small group viewing areas, group collaboration/study areas and a large bay to handle media format conversion. The latest tech fee award allowed BRL to augment the above equipment with the purchase of SONY™ e-book readers and digital cameras with video capabilities. The library has appropriated funding to support a reference collection of instructional design and multimedia development resources.

Background

The Multimedia Commons at Queens College

Inspired initially by the completion of a report from an internal task force, the Multimedia Commons in the Benjamin Rosenthal Library (BRL) of Queens College (QC), part of the City University of New York (CUNY), was completed and unveiled in Autumn 2008. The fully renovated and wireless facility boasts eight Mac-based, multi-format individual viewing workstations, three multimedia development collaboration spaces, two small group areas with large digital display screens and wireless headsets, four group collaboration/study areas, one large bay to handle media format conversion, and a new reference collection of instructional design and multimedia development resources. The Multimedia Commons continues to offer loans of the sixty laptops, 15 MacBooks®, 5 scientific calculators, e-book readers, digital cameras and on a paging basis, the media and microforms collections owned by BRL.

The creation of the space was funded by the Technology Fee grant initiative on the QC campus. Two successive years worth of approved funding supported the physical renovation and also the acquisition of state-of-the-art technologies. The work was completed in collaboration with a team representing the Technology Fee Committee, the Office of Converging Technologies (I.E., the campus computing support unit), and designers from the Campus Facilities and Services Office.

The Multimedia Commons is a “rendering of concept” that was derived from ideas presented by that original task force and its findings. More specifically, the report tried to prognosticate where academic library media services will be heading in the years to come. The rendering was also guided by the findings of an additional grant project which afforded site visits to both local and distant academic sites. The grant, “New Media Commons, 2010: The state of the art in academic library media services,” supported the investigation of current trends and best practices at public and private institutions nationwide. All told, eleven sites were visited

in 2008. They included the media service units of Barnard College (BC), College of Staten Island - City University of New York (CSI), Columbia University (CU), Georgetown University (GU), New York University (NYU), University of Maryland - College Park (UMD), University of Massachusetts – Amherst (UMA), University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill (UNC), University of Texas – Austin (UTA), University of Washington – Seattle (UWS), and Vassar College (VC).

Media Services in Academic Libraries

Media facilities and services in today's academic libraries are chasing after developing technology at break-neck speed. Library professionals seeking indications of up-to-date standards, best practices, and the skill sets that are needed to plan effective facilities, staffing and services rely upon guidelines that were revised and published by the national library association in the spring of 2006. (ACRL, 2006.) While these guidelines address media services in broad, general strokes, they do not provide a current comprehensive listing of what comprises such media services units. Similarly, the library literature has published few benchmarking or standards publications related to media services over the past several years. With this investigation, the "hidden gems," particularly within current practices, will be revealed. By investigating and reporting on current service standards, practices, inter-institutional relationships, and staffing skill sets, managers of academic library media services units, both within CUNY and at other academic institutions, will better be able to understand the needs demanded of today's multimedia learning service units. They will better be able to support and collaborate with other faculty members and, most importantly, to provide effective services and support to students. Finally, managers of academic media services units will be able to fully understand, demonstrate, and advocate for appropriate levels of integration and support of the media services unit both within the academic library and across the parent institution.

Literature Review

Media services units in academic libraries are an ideal nexus where today's faculty, both librarians and those in the non-library disciplines, can come together to develop and exploit effective multi-media curriculum resources. It is also in the media services unit where the savvy multi-format learner will be able to access resources both digital and analog and produce course-related learning products the likes of which we only imagined just a decade ago. These concepts are reflected in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) "Guidelines for media resources in academic libraries." The ACRL guidelines frame librarian managers of media services units as becoming, "true partners in the delivery of instruction, working with faculty, technologists, and instructional developers to create 'new learning communities'" (ACRL, 2006, ¶ 2). Within the guidelines are general statements supporting the professional stature of the media unit leader, funding ideals that under-gird a modern facility, prompts indicating needs for user education and public relations ideas, typical library standards for collection development, preservation and accessibility, and brief ideas indicating the need for functioning facilities and equipment that provide the well-honed "vehicle" for delivery of media services.

In searching for descriptions, the faculty librarian can refer to very compelling, if not current, vignettes of progressive media services units in the professional literature. Schmidt and Rieck, (2000), offer a detailed media services handbook that serves as a media services manager's main guide. The handbook notes the evolution of media services beyond

traditional audio/visual collection artifacts (e.g. filmstrips, VHS tapes, and audiocassettes), and the basic means of on-site access such as the VCR and music playback equipment. Instead, newer media services units are embracing advanced digital technologies, loaning equipment for off-site use, venturing into multi-media support and development, and offering teleconferencing and distributed media services across campus. When considering the planning of media facilities, Schmidt and Rieck, stress functionality, flexibility, quality, convenience and the ease of both facility use and facility maintenance.

Some academic media services units have been trying to keep pace with new learning environments while embracing the planning ideals espoused above. In 2004 librarians gathered at Vassar College in New York to explore the design and construction of new learning spaces (Project Kaleidoscope, 2004). Facilities and faculty planning activities at several other institutions have had an impact on progressing toward ideal academic learning spaces. The Halle Library at Eastern Michigan University is one example. "Among the many features of the new facility are a multimedia commons and a faculty commons. A new initiative entitled the Technology and Information Program (TIP) will encourage and support efforts to improve instruction and research through the use of computers and digital technology" (Boone, 1998, p.32). Developed nearly ten years ago, "the Halle" includes teleconferencing facilities, codec/T1 distance learning service, materials, language labs, viewing equipment, computer labs, and a faculty development lab all supported by a merged library and information and computing technology unit. This unit also supports student multi-media development labs and classroom services including distributed media delivery. An update on the viability and progress in this advanced facility would be most valuable to library media service unit managers.

The libraries at Towson University in Maryland conducted in-depth surveys that resulted in an array of services similar to those at "the Halle." The survey included, "a 'new technologies' instrument to assess current and projected use of emerging technologies" and results indicated "faculty need for professional development...training in multimedia development, use of presentation software, integration of new technologies as become available on campus" (Leather, 1998, p.18). The survey results also indicated the establishment of a "center for instructional advancement and technology" (Leather, 1998, p.20). It is interesting to note that the Towson situation developed under a unit comprised of merged libraries and campus technologies departments.

The libraries at the University of North Texas host a multimedia development lab. The lab delivers services that support, "...Web development, Web and graphics instructional support, and multimedia development for the Web to University of North Texas affiliates. Specifically, these services include: HTML programming, page layout, and design, Web graphics production, creation of multimedia elements for the Web, training and custom documentation necessary to maintain projects created by the lab" (Hurt, 2003, p.24). Service standards and project management guidelines come to the surface in this multimedia lab as important tools for successful customer service and project completion.

From filmstrips to streaming digital media, faculty managers leading the development of academic libraries' media services units need a picture of current practices, facilities and frameworks for planning services. One such recent article has been a refreshing addition to the professional literature. It is bundled with other forward looking articles about media services in libraries in a special issue of *Library Trends*. In it the author projects up-to-roles for the media librarian. "New forms of experimentation, reconfiguration, outreach, and

collaboration will play a leading and influential role in the development of the final set of core themes for the research library: the creation and distribution of fresh resources and services.” (Vallier, p.381) Vallier demonstrates with some examples of how today’s academic media services units are meeting these new challenges. The information generated from this research project and resulting article will assist academic faculty in advancing their institutions’ new learning services which in turn will greatly benefit our high-tech oriented multi-media savvy students.

Another role that has expanded because of the changes happening with media and academic learning evolution is that of how the librarian conveys our services to our patrons. Huwe speaks to how being a “digital communicator” is now part of the roles the lead librarian has in the media services unit. Our current services are now augmented by, “...an interest in information counseling, content management, and preservation – and it turns out that these activities can be keys to innovation both within and beyond the library walls.” (Huwe, p 26.)

Unique findings and service provisions of visits

Each academic library will of course exhibit services that are unique to their own institutional demands, infrastructure, budget, and mission and while common themes will arise in the provision of media services, the libraries visited also offered a variety of compelling services. For instance, at UWS the Media Center in the undergraduate library offer 25 multimedia development workstations in addition to the football field of internet workstations. They also maintain a desk with a geek squad similar to that of the commercial store Best Buy™. Their web presence highlights the efforts of digitizing local specialty arts content and the library is now moving toward offering limited video streaming access to portions of video media via insertion in the campus online course management system. This is the first library system visited that sported group viewing areas for digital media consumption. It’s also interesting to note how UWS has utilized its own home-grown content for instructional purposes. This takes the form of the YouTube® videos linked in their web site.

Both UWS and Media Services at CSI offer satellite videoconferencing facilities being used to support collaborative distant education. CSI’s efforts support international course collaborations with schools in both Asia and South Africa. CSI, like several of the other sites visited, still supports the lending of equipment for classroom use, but this service has extended to faculty and student use of equipment for the development of digital content. This library also maintains a homegrown video distribution system. Of course, copyright considerations and access management policies and procedures have been developed to handle patron use fairly and efficiently. CSI maintains a robust library instruction facility for in-library class visits.

Space counts and the Media Cloisters, (recently re-styled “The Digital Media Zone”) at VC is set out in open library space and offers large screen digital displays that enhance digital collaboration in a lounge environment. Their “Team Spot” software allows this real time digital collaboration. On a much larger scale, the new famous “Learning Commons” of the UMA library was a forerunner in breaking services and formats out of their typical separate spaces and merged them into a common area reflective of today’s trends in media convergence and academic trends with multi- and inter-disciplinary collaborative studies.

With a different twist on the management of computing resources, the NYU Digital Studio is a faculty development lab supporting teaching and scholarship which is primarily led by the

campus technology services unit. Different variations of the labs are now often combined with other teaching and instructional development labs in universities and colleges today.

At UNC the Media Resources Center has chosen to use a home-grown booking system rather than the module from their integrated online library system. They also provide what was initially called their “Collaboratory,” now simply the Digital Media Labs, which offers multimedia development spaces to faculty and students alike in up-to-date facilities. While all of the sites visited offer viewing facilities, these at UNC include separate audio studios and video editing suites. In response to the phenomenon of evolving media formats, UNC hosts a reformatting work station to allow for content migration. This facility has a regular series of training offerings to enable users to learn how to use of the resources provided.

The UMD Non-Print Media Services Library probably wins the prize for their eighty-eight carrels offering all materials on a local broadcast basis. This effort is currently migrating to a course management system digital streaming strategy for course reserves similar to the activity at UWS. Otherwise, the team here takes great pride in the “mediagraphies,” that they maintain.

The media services at UTA were evolving and being shifted as the undergraduate library underwent change. Their Fine Arts Library has become the central host to media services and provides an extension of the re-designed services already being offered. The media services of the library still offers a campus delivery service for media use in classrooms. This is in addition to the standard media equipment loans and, a more recent trend in libraries, laptop loans. UTA was one of the sites maintaining a collection of campus digital content for faculty and student use. It takes the form of archives of lectures in video.

Media Services at BC reflect a rather high end approach to media production. Beyond the now typical work stations for student and faculty viewing and editing, the unit also offers high-end video production facilities and services for both classroom and college event and administrative communications. They offer support for the development of audio and video learning objects as well. Across the street at CU, the Butler Media Services targets media consumption services at students and offers an extensive collection of cinema film, video, and audio objects. There is an collection of extensive film and media research guides.

The Gelardin New Media Center at GU sports all of the services described above and it’s all in a donor-funded facility. The library pays tribute to the donors by using the names on their mouse pads and space names. In addition to the labs, work stations, training, and production services, they’ve wrapped in expertise with GIS data handling and content development. Another standard not mentioned above is that GU, like the other facilities, offer multi-region viewing equipment whenever possible so that analog foreign film objects can be viewed by the patrons whenever necessary.

The libraries at GU, UMD, and UTA all have put their internal expertise and skills to good use by developing outstanding public relations materials. The brochures, bumper stickers, and bookmarks are all attractive and portable enabling effective “mobile” outreach; which also brings to the front the idea of effective web presence of the media services. I noticed that generally when a facility was able to develop an interface independent or “extra” of the parent library or university web site, they tended to be much more dynamic and attractive.

Staffing & Skill Sets

A look across the directories of the sites that were visited belies a firm commitment to resources being maintained in order to offer media services in the academic learning environment. Typically there is at least one professional librarian that takes the lead in a multimedia services unit. This person more often than not has an area of specialization in cinema, film, or other media arts interest. This person manages the combined services and programs of other staff with similar visual arts and computing interests and expertise. They act as the foremost interpreter and digital communicator of the services offered that allow faculty and students to know, learn about and utilize existing objects and those created independently or collaboratively. They advance services that speak to trends in academic as well as general ICT developments, increasingly digital and mobile or distant.

The other staff in the media services units possesses an array of ICT skills that successfully bend media for effective development of teaching and learning objects and opportunities both on campus and at a distance. They also typically manage what is now mostly a born-digital student work-study-based work force.

Other newer skills needed by the team to accomplish the goals above include embracing the web as a delivery system of services and support items for services (e.g. policies, request forms, tutorials, digitized versions of unique institutionally owned content, etc.) With the web as the vehicle for the new content and services, the library multimedia services staff must be expert in utilizing all of the tools that generate the new content and services. This ranges from web design and editing, to digital audio and video creation. It also includes embracing new social media to assist with the efforts above and then pushing one goal further by using that very social media as an effective outreach, marketing and training platform in order to meet the born-digital user in the digital realms where they now live and learn.

Media Services Units Visited:

Barnard College – <http://library.barnard.edu/support/media>
College of Staten Island - CUNY - <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/media-services>
Columbia University – <http://library.columbia.edu/indiv/bmc.html>
Georgetown University - <http://www.library.georgetown.edu/gelardin>
New York University - <http://library.nyu.edu/afc/> & Digital Studio - <http://www.nyu.edu/its/studio/>
University of Maryland - College Park - <http://www.lib.umd.edu/nonprint/>
University of Massachusetts – Amherst - <http://www.library.umass.edu/services/reserves/media/>
University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill - <http://www.lib.unc.edu/house/mrc/>
University of Texas – Austin - <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/media.html>
University of Washington - Seattle - <http://www.lib.washington.edu/media/>
Vassar College - <http://mediacloisters.vassar.edu/>

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