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A Content Analysis of the Strategic Plans of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities' Academic Libraries

Tom Bielavitz

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Abstract

As academic libraries support the curricular mission of the university, the strategic plans of academic libraries often reflect the priorities and initiatives of the larger institution. Urban universities often incorporate concepts of community engagement in their mission. The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (<http://www.usucoalition.org>), a federation of 43 urban universities, has developed initiatives which seek to establish the university and city as partners.

Using the publicly-accessible strategic plans of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) affiliated libraries as a data set, the research will perform a content analysis, using Atlas.ti software, to look for evidence that the libraries are supporting the USU's initiatives and goals. The research will explore examples of how urban academic libraries support their universities' urban engagement initiatives.

Keywords: content analysis, urban strategic planning

Introduction

Urban universities and communities share a history of collaboration in America. They are often large employers, providing regional economic vitality. Urban universities' curriculum may include concepts of service learning, in which the students and faculty focus on community problems and issues. Historically, there has been encouragement from Federal, State, and private foundation funding. Examples include the Morrill Acts of 1882 and 1890 that established the state university systems, charged with providing practical regional education; the 1944 G.I. Bill that increased higher education attainment; and the Community Outreach Partnership Centers (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development), which provide grants to support university/community collaborative initiatives for urban

revitalization. These and other efforts helped to establish the concept that urban universities and cities are key partners in community development.

This research will explore the ways that urban academic libraries support the community engagement initiatives of their institutions. As academic libraries support the curricular mission of the university, the strategic plans of academic libraries often reflect the priorities and initiatives of the larger institution. Organizations such as Great Cities' Universities, the Commission on Urban Initiatives, the Association of Public and Land - grant Universities, and the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU), are advancing agendas of urban university engagement. This paper will focus on the USU, which has developed three initiatives: 1) Creating a Competitive Workforce, 2) Building Strong Communities, and 3) Improving the Health of a Diverse Population. The author performed a content analysis of the publicly-accessible strategic plans of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities' libraries, seeking evidence and providing anonymous examples from the texts of the ways in which libraries are supporting the USU's initiatives and goals.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. Do the strategic plans of urban academic libraries reflect the initiatives of their institutions, as members of USU, and to what extent?
2. Which of the USU themes are most commonly supported?
3. In an urban university, how does an academic library support their universities' goals of urban engagement?
4. Do urban academic libraries support the urban engagement efforts of their universities in ways other than those that support the USU's three themes?

Review of Literature

There is no research exploring the relationship between urban academic libraries' strategic plans and the urban engagement mission of their universities. The review of literature will explore areas pertaining to the role of the urban university and library as well as concepts of strategic planning and alignment.

The thesis of this research is that a content analysis of the strategic plans of the USU institution libraries will show support of the institution's urban engagement mission. Therefore, the research will seek evidence of correlations between the library strategic plans and the USU's themes and initiatives. This premise is based on two fundamental concepts of strategic planning and strategic alignment: strategic plans are an organization's formal articulation of its priorities and

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activities, and that organizations coordinate, or align, the strategic plans of lower - level units with those of the overall organization.

Chandler (1962) was the first strategic management theorist to address the need for an organization to coordinate the work of subordinate units under one strategy. Mintzberg (1994) defines strategic planning as “a formalized procedure to produce an articulated result, in the form of an integrated system of decisions” (p.12). And, all of the activities of an organization’s separate units must be aligned around the strategic plan: “the articulation of plans provides a mechanism of communication that promotes coordination across the different parts of the organization...There can be little doubt that plans and planning can serve as important mechanisms to knit disparate activities together” (p.16-17). Kaplan and Norton’s *Alignment* (2006) identified methods of strategically aligning all aspects of an organization’s operations, including the financial and customer strategies, the internal processes of subordinate work units, the strategies of the board and investors and other external partners. “Alignment is critical if enterprises are to achieve synergies throughout their business and support units” (p. 27).

Two recent reports document the relationship between urban universities and their engagement with their respective cities. The USU’s *A Vital Partnership: Great Cities, Great Universities* serves as both a white paper and an update on the initiatives and progress of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities: “The Goal is simple: by harnessing the collective power of our public urban research universities, we will rebuild America’s cities and once again make them places for opportunity, innovation, and vitality” (p. 1). *Linking Colleges to Communities: Engaging the University for Community Development* details the history of university/city engagement, beginning with the Morrill Acts through the Bayh- Dole Act of 1980, which provided legislative encouragement for universities to contribute, and benefit from, regional economic development (Democracy Collaborative at the University of Maryland, p. 9-21). This report also examines current examples of university/city engagement and models of service-learning (p.49-74). Of particular importance to this research are the chapters on enlisting faculty and student support for purposes of community engagement. The report notes that gaining student support for university/city engagement “requires linking engagement to curricula that contribute to student career development” and that “defining community-supporting work as worthy of scholarship” is essential in encouraging faculty engagement (p.77-81).

McCabe’s *Academic Libraries in Urban and Metropolitan Areas: A Management Handbook* examines several aspects of the nature of urban academic libraries. Williams’ chapter discusses the service mission of the urban university in the context of the history of American higher education:

urban universities have developed as perhaps the purest form of a university devoted to the service ideal. These institutions were established specifically to meet the needs of the city and its population, and while they have developed significant research programs, they have remained true to this purpose. (p.5).

Williams also discusses the supporting role of the library of an urban university:

While the universities' services that are most obvious focus on providing traditional educational opportunities for working class students to prepare them for professional life, they are also in a unique position to provide services to the business community, to city government, and to others who have the need for the special skills and services that they bring to the community. The library should be a key part of this program. (p. 12).

Russell (1992) and Mitchell (1992) both surveyed urban academic libraries and found wide ranging behavior regarding services to external constituencies. Simons (1992) found that urban academic libraries play a role in their universities' regional economic development mission by providing access to local economic development and urban revitalization resources. McNamara (1992) and Tiller (1992) both explore the urban academic library's role in K-20 education, recommending that libraries offer bibliographic and information literacy instruction, access to information resources, and collaboration between high schools and universities.

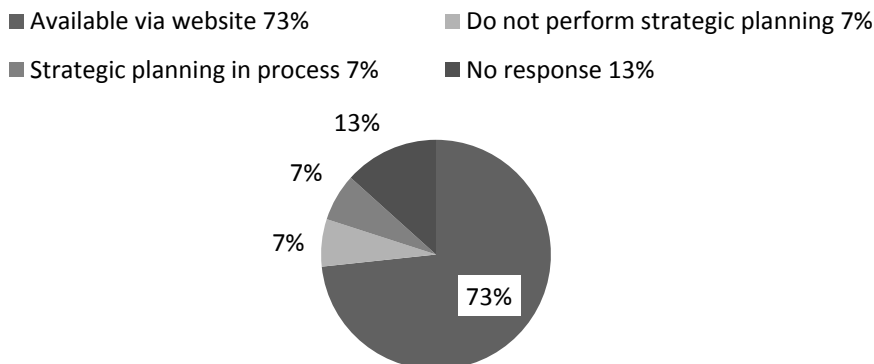
Methodology

Population and sampling

The 46 USU-affiliated institutions formed the population of the study. Sampling was determined by availability of the strategic plans. Thirty-three strategic plans were analyzed: 31 were available via the library websites, and two were solicited via email. The remaining 12 libraries were also contacted via email; 3 responded that they do not participate in formalized strategic planning, and 3 were in the process of creating/revising strategic plans. Six libraries did not respond. The strategic plans were presented in a variety of formats, and though the time spans covered by each varied greatly, all were current at the time of analysis.

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Graph 1: Distribution of response rate (n=46):



Data Collection

Neuendorf defines content analysis, a form of quantitative analysis, as “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics;” in this research, the texts of the strategic plans are the analyzed “messages” (p.1). Each strategic plan was loaded into content analysis software, Atlas.ti, as a separate primary document. The texts of each primary document were tagged using the open – coding, line by line, method developed by Strauss and Corbin, which requires close examination of each sentence of the data (p. 119-120).

The format of the strategic plans ranged from texts structured with paragraphs and complete sentences to simple bullet point lists. Neuendorf defines a *unit* as

an identifiable message component, (a) which serves as the basis for identifying the population and drawing a sample, (b) on which results are measured, or (c) which serves as the basis for reporting analyses. Units can be words, characters, themes...or any other result of “breaking up a communication into bits” (Neuendorf p.71, Carney p.52).

The researcher performed an initial coding of the primary documents by tagging sections of the text with codes from the USU code list. The author coded on the most granular level, usually sentence by sentence, unless contingent sentences communicated the same idea. For example, a paragraph constructed of five sentences about a library’s “k-20 educational pipeline” initiative would only be coded once. Sentences and paragraphs (or sections of) that contained multiple concepts were coded with multiple codes. If the same concept was mentioned more than once in the strategic plan, in separate areas, each appearance of the concept was coded. Text that did not correspond to a code was not coded. This approach allowed separation of different concepts into separate codes. It also provides a perspective of the quantitative importance of concepts. The USU themes and initiatives served as code families and code categories, respectively (see Table 1).

Table 1: Code Families and Codes

Code Family	Code
Creating a Competitive Workforce	Urban teacher preparation programs Transition programs for new teachers Teacher tracking and data systems "Turnaround" schools K-20 pipeline partnerships
Building Strong Communities	Urban neighborhood revitalization Regional economic development Community and university capacity building activities
Improving the Health of a Diverse Population	Engaged education in urban communities K-20 health careers and diversity pipeline partnerships Training programs for community health workers Cultural competency programs Urban health curriculum Career development for researchers studying health disparities
Ancillary	Collection development in support of university's programs and priorities Collection development, supporting faculty research Urban engagement/ providing service to the community Providing community access Scholarly communications Institutional repository
Commentary	Refers to institution's strategic plan / alignment with institutional strategic plan, priorities Nothing aligns with USU themes or research scope

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In addition to the USU codes, in-vivo codes emerged during the initial coding. Strauss and Corbin describe in-vivo codes as codes whose:

name may be placed on the objects by the analyst because of the imagery or meaning they evoke when examined comparatively in and out of context....As we continue with our data analysis, if we come across another object, event, act, or happening that we identify through *comparative analysis* as sharing some common characteristics with an object or happening....then we place it into the same code (p. 105).

In-vivo codes were created to tag concepts in the text that supported the premise of the research but did not directly correspond to the USU-based code structure. An example is the in-vivo code “urban engagement.” Although none of the 3 USU themes specifically identify urban engagement, the concept is clearly part of USU’s mission: “The presidents and chancellors of public urban research universities are calling upon one another- and the nation to escalate urban university engagement” (The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, p.2). Two ancillary codes emerged regarding collection development, one in support of faculty and student research, and the other in support of curriculum. A premise of academic collection development is that it supports the research and curricular needs of the institution. In an urban academic library, this includes community-focused research and a curriculum of service learning. For these reasons, the collection development activities of an urban academic library provide support of the university’s service mission. For the same reasons, strategic initiatives regarding scholarly communications and institutional repositories, alternative methods of providing access to intellectual content, also emerged as codes. These codes were grouped into an “Ancillary” code family. Another code family, named “Commentary,” allowed the researcher to make meta comments on the primary document itself. For example, the researcher created the code “mentions alignment with institution’s strategic plan/goals” to substantiate a correlation between the strategic plans of the libraries and the universities. The Commentary code family quotes are not counted in the total quote population.

After completing an initial coding of all primary documents, the documents were recoded for consistency. Then, using the “code frequency list” function of Atlas.ti, infrequently used codes were merged or deleted as needed. The final list of code families and codes is presented in Table 1.

Results

The results of the research are analyzed within the context of the total quote population (n=246) as well as within each code family. The author includes anonymous examples of quotes from the texts to illustrate how academic libraries

are supporting urban engagement initiatives. These examples answer the third and fourth research questions.

The first question posed by this research is: do the strategic plans of urban academic libraries reflect the initiatives of their institutions, as members of USU, and to what extent? The strategic plans of 33 USU-affiliated libraries were coded in the course of this study. Twenty-one (63.63%, n=33) of the primary documents were coded with the Commentary code of “Library strategic plan in alignment with University strategic plan,” which indicates that the majority of the library strategic plans explicitly state that there is alignment between the library and university strategic plans.

Examples of this quote:

Building upon the University Strategic Plan, the ...Libraries endeavor to be seen by our clients and colleagues, on campus and beyond, as a model library serving a pre-eminent public research University with an urban mission.

As the heart of a vital institution, the University Library actively engages in (the University’s) mission of teaching, research, service, and economic development. Its values emanate from the University’s mission.

The Library will direct its resources and activities towards the goals articulated in the University's Mission, Goals & Strategies.

Two of the strategic plans (6.06%, n=33) contained no quotations pertaining to this research’s focus on the USU themes and initiatives or to the Ancillary codes.

Coding the primary documents resulted in a total population of 246 quotes (n=246). The distribution of quotes in each code family category provides an overview of the research results.

Graph 2 illustrates that a significant majority (85%) of the quotations are in the Ancillary code family. These are codes that do not represent specific USU themes or initiatives, but do support the USU initiatives in ancillary ways, as presented in Table 2.

The Ancillary code family represents 84.95% of the entire quote population (n=246), and includes many of the traditional roles of an urban academic library: collection development, providing service and access to the urban community, and initiatives to provide alternative forms of access to resources (scholarly communications and institutional repositories).

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Graph 2: Distribution of quotes within code families (n=246):

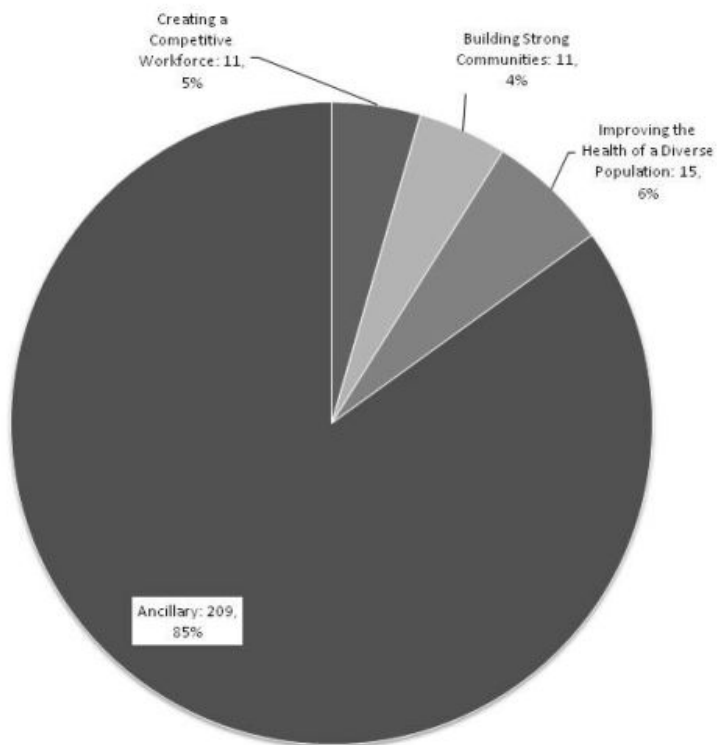


Table 2: Code Frequency of the Ancillary Code Family (n=209):

Ancillary Code Family	Frequency n= 246	% within Code Family n=209	% within total code population n=246
Collection development, supporting curriculum	29	13.88	11.78
Collection development, supporting faculty research	23	11.00	9.34
Urban engagement	42	20.10	17.07
Providing community access	36	17.22	14.63
Scholarly communications	25	11.96	10.16
Institutional repository	23	11.00	9.34
Access to health science information	14	6.70	5.69
Mutually beneficial collaboration with community	5	2.39	2.03
Providing community service	5	2.39	2.03
Collaboration with health care providers	4	1.91	1.62
Service for health care students/workers	3	1.44	1.21
Family total	209		84.95

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Examples

Code: Urban engagement

(The library) must become known as the region's most valued academic resource and friend. We need to capitalize on our strategic location to increasingly engage businesses and other institutions in cooperative relationships. (The Library) will strengthen its niche in the community by providing services to help meet the educational and economic development needs of the region.

Remembering Our Mission and Goals by recognizing the importance of the 1890 Land-Grant heritage and the responsibilities of a comprehensive urban university library not only as a depository for research but also as a facility to educate and inspire students in understanding the historic and current role of (the) State University

Develop and maintain an organizational environment which will support recruitment of a competent and diversified library faculty committed to provision of excellent and responsive library services, and in sufficient number to fully support the metropolitan mission of (the University).

Code: Collection Development

Libraries transform lives. Great libraries are essential to supporting the mission of great universities. The...University Vision 2010 identifies academic excellence in a welcoming inclusive environment and service as a crucial resource for Silicon Valley as essential for the University. Therefore, in support of this vision, the University Library is a gateway to information resources, scholarship and our diverse intellectual and cultural heritage. In creating this access, we enrich student learning, support faculty research and scholarship and contribute to the life-long learning for all of the community.

Provide a Library Collection that meets the curricular and research needs of both faculty and students, as well as accommodates new and expanded educational programs and initiatives. This includes analyzing materials selection to better target and support faculty, students, and curricular needs; exploring patron-driven collection development, and investigating streaming audio and video for the music and media collection.

The Library's primary business is to provide the knowledge resources needed to support the university's primary mission: education and research. As knowledge grows, as the goals and aims of disciplines and curricula evolve, as new programs are added to the menu, the Library Collection must constantly grow to reflect and meet the new academic needs.

Code: Scholarly Communications

At the same time, national funding agencies are expressing interest in data management, curation, and archiving issues, while the NSF and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) are examining the cyber infrastructure that is needed to support research and scholarship in the digital age. Like many other universities and organizations, (the University) will need to address how best to provide support for digital scholarship and to preserve the results of the institution's creative efforts while making them accessible, as appropriate, to the university community and beyond. (The library) needs to leverage the creative efforts of its community across the community. In short, (the University) needs a knowledge management strategy.

In-vivo codes also emerged for non-traditional roles as well, such as establishing mutually beneficial collaborative partnerships with the community, providing service to health care students/workers, and collaborative projects with health care providers.

Examples

Codes: Access to health science information / providing community access/ urban engagement/providing community service

As part of the engaged University, the Library is eager to contribute its resources and expertise to external communities. The Library participates in a number of state and local projects, such as the I-Share consortium and the ... Metro History Fair, and hopes to increase its outreach to ... community organizations and individuals. The Library's greatest outreach strength, however, lies in the health sciences. Providing information to the community, collaborating with other ... departments and colleges on community outreach projects, and making information resources available to other Libraries and unaffiliated health professionals throughout the state all are key thrusts in the Library's health information plan. A commitment to outreach requires staff dedicated to this activity, to plan and engage in community activities. It also requires a robust technological infrastructure that will support electronic delivery of information and instruction. With the major health science library in Chicago and site libraries...the... Library is well-positioned to expand on its already strong outreach programs.

Codes: Access to health science information / Collaboration with health care providers

Emerging issues in healthcare: The constantly changing healthcare environment challenges librarians to meet new and changing health information needs. In the clinical arena, evidence-based health care requires a high degree of search-and-retrieval expertise, as well as skill in analyzing

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and evaluating information. Librarians may be called on to work closely with health care teams, and even to accompany them on patient rounds. The growing involvement of citizens in their own health care has increased the role of health sciences librarians in several ways. They are called on to provide patient information for providers, they instruct public and other librarians in finding and evaluating health care resources, and they meet consumer health information needs. The NIH Roadmap, a plan developed to identify major opportunities and gaps in biomedical research, suggests several areas in which the academic medical library can play a role. The new emphasis on translational research will lead to demands for new information resources, expertise in data retrieval and in-depth analysis and integration of data. The Electronic Medical Record will provide new opportunities for data mining and linking scholarly and clinical data. Increasing concern with public health issues, such as disaster preparedness and emerging diseases, as well as the national focus on eliminating health disparities highlight the crucial need for information dissemination methods and information literacy skills.

Table 3: Creating a Competitive Workforce Code Family (n=11)

Creating Competitive Workforce Code Family	Frequency n= 246	% within Code Family n=11	% within total code population n=246
Urban teacher preparation programs	2	18.18	0.81
Transition programs for new teachers	0	0.00	0.00
Teacher tracking and data systems	0	0.00	0.00
"Turnaround" schools	0	0.00	0.00
K-20 pipeline partnerships	9	81.81	3.65
Family total	11		4.47

The “Creating a Competitive Workforce” code family represents 4.47% of the total quote population (n=246). Nine quotes were coded with the “K-20 pipeline partnership” code, and 2 quotes were coded with “Urban teacher preparation programs.”

Examples

Codes: Urban teacher preparedness programs, K-20 Pipeline Partnerships

In addition, our Library's Teacher Curriculum Center (TCC) offers in-house, hands-on "lab" use of its collection of K-12 curriculum materials to local community educators. It has an ongoing outreach program to inform local teachers of this service. The TCC's collection includes both print and nonprint materials that would actually be used within an elementary or secondary school classroom.

Code: K-20 Pipeline Partnerships

The Library has always been heavily involved in the University's retention efforts. To begin with, we have hired four librarians who are specifically geared to bringing and keeping students engaged and informed, and keeping our efforts on track: our First Year Experience Librarian, our Outreach Services Librarian, our Online Instructional Design Librarian, and our Library Assessment Librarian. All of these faculty's efforts are centered on reaching out to local schools, to possible new students, their parents and teachers, to providing first year students with all the tools and access to multiple types of information resources needed to succeed, and a continuing assessment of our efforts, collection and facility to make sure we are providing services in the best possible manner.

Codes: Engaged education in urban communities, K-20 pipeline partnerships

Initiative: K-20 Community Engagement for Information Literacy skills development: The Library will...introduce high school students to the environment and resources of the University through continued participation in Challenge and High School FRINQ programs.

Table 4: Building Strong Communities Workforce Code Family:

Building Strong Communities Code Family	Frequency n= 246	% within Code Family n=11	% within total code population n=246
Urban neighborhood revitalization	0	0.00	0.00
Regional economic development	9	81.18	3.65
Community and university capacity building activities	2	18.18	0.81
Family total	11		4.47

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The “Building Strong Communities Workforce” code family represents 4.47% of the total quote population (n=246). Nine quotes were coded with the “Regional economic development” code, and 2 quotes were coded with “Community and university capacity building activities.”

Examples

Code: Regional Economic Development

As the heart of a vital institution, the University Library actively engages in (the University’s) mission of teaching, research, service, and economic development. Its values emanate from the University’s mission.

Code: Community and university capacity building activities:

Build a research and development capacity to foster innovation, expand Library engagement in research on campus, and explore opportunities for building cost-recovery services. A research and development component within the Library could foster the development of new services and help promote the research mission of the Library and the University by identifying and implementing technological innovations for the advancement of multiple types of research for UIC and our broader constituency. This unit would look at the possibility of offering some services on a cost-recovery basis.

Table 5: Improving the Health of a Diverse Population Workforce Code Family:

Improving the Health of a Diverse Population	Frequency n= 246	% within Code Family n=15	% within total code population n=246
Engaged education in urban communities	3	20.00	1.21
K-20 health careers and diversity pipeline partnerships	2	13.33	0.81
Training programs for community health workers	3	20.00	1.21
Cultural competency programs	4	26.66	1.62
Urban health curriculum	3	20.00	1.21
Career development for researchers studying health disparities	0	0.00	0.00
Family total	15		6.09

The “Improving the Health of a Diverse Population Workforce” code family represents 6% of the total quote population (n=246). The code “Cultural competency programs” represented 26.66% of the code family (n=15) and is the most-commonly supported USU initiative. Following are “Engaged education in urban communities,” “Urban health curriculum,” and “Training programs for community health workers,” each representing 20%. “K-20 health careers and diversity pipeline partnerships” represents 13.33% of the code family.

Examples

Code: Urban health curriculum

The University Libraries strategic goals align with the (University) goals by:

- Serve as an essential partner with the health science schools and programs to advance the life and health sciences mission of the University and the regional community.

- Provide resources required for research in life and health sciences.
- Provide resources and support for...programs that address community health needs.
- Continue and enhance the Clinical Medical Librarian program to embed information literacy skills at the point of need.
- Employ mobile technologies for information-seeking needs of the health sciences professional.

Code: Cultural competency programs

In February we collaborated with the Black History month planning committee to mount exhibits in (the) Library that focused on the Brown vs. the Board of Education case and to also sponsor the public showing of the film *Hoxie: the first stand*.

Limitations and Further Research

There are limitations to this research. Research performed by a sole analyst is vulnerable to that individual’s bias (Patton p.1190-1196). Employing two or more analysts allows the researcher to perform statistical analysis of inter-rater reliability, which determines the degree in which there is consensus among the analysts. In the scope of this research, a second analyst would use the same code book to independently code the 43 primary documents. Cohen’s kappa, a statistic appropriate for research performed by two analysts, would determine the extent of analyst agreement. Without testing inter-rater reliability, the author can not generalize the results of this research towards the 13% of the data population’s libraries that did not have or provide strategic plans (Tinsley p.95-101). To mitigate the effect of researcher bias in this paper, examples from the primary documents are included to support the statistics.

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There are paths for further research. For example, this research does not also analyze the strategic plans of the USU universities. Correlations between the university and library strategic plans may be proven by a comparison of those data sets. Another path is to use a random sampling of strategic plans of urban academic libraries, not limited to USU affiliates. Lastly, strategic plans are high-level documents, and contain few details. These primary documents identify the strategic initiatives of each library, but do not necessarily capture all of the activities of a library. Further research could entail surveys with each of the USU libraries to gather more data.

Conclusion

The research finds that the majority of the primary documents indicate alignment between library and university strategic plans. The data population of coded quotations shows that urban academic libraries largely play a traditional role in supporting their universities' urban engagement initiatives. Urban engagement, providing community access and service, and collection development in support of curriculum and research are the most prevalent examples. The research also provides examples of urban academic libraries' initiatives that directly support the USU's strategic themes.

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