

The “ACADEMIC 15”

Emerging Roles in 21st-Century Learning Support

A Proof-of-Concept Research Study Examining Academic Support Staff in Higher Education

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Research Question

- How can the perspective of academic staff provide an insight into curricular change and library / IT organizational responses?
- In what ways might it supplement other views of higher education constituents: NSSE, FSSE, MISO, LibQual+, ECAR?

Methodology: Phase 1

- Interviewed 24 library & IT Staff involved in supporting teachers, learners, and researchers, on experiences of curricular change and Library / IT organizational responses.
- Results analyzed and distilled into 15 themes.

Next Steps: Phase 2

- Recruit sponsorship from Library and IT professional organizations; hire professional ethnographers to interview & analyze response.
- Review methodology; expand scope to 50 participants.

Salient Trends

- 1 Fundamental reconsiderations of pedagogy are having a dramatic impact on the curriculum and challenge us to rethink our strategies for supporting learning.
- 2 Cloud-based and consumer-oriented, third-party services create user expectations we struggle to meet in an era of limited staff budgets and funding.
- 3 We're challenged to balance generalist support of basic services with the advanced technology and information needs of increasingly sophisticated faculty.
- 4 We find it difficult to staff and fund the support of established services while also investing resources in research and development and innovation.
- 5

The redefinition of the academic library in the digital age is a point of tension for library staff and the academic community.

Organizational Needs

- 6 We need to evolve from providing tools for users to the more demanding work of forming communities with users to collectively understand evolving curricular needs.
- 7 We need to communicate better within our organizations and between our organizations and our community.
- 8 We need to redefine our staff roles to promote people-focused, flexible, creative, entrepreneurial, community-integrated work groups.
- 9 As our roles change, creating meaningful opportunities for professional development becomes crucial.
- 10 Managing the effects of change on people is perhaps our most salient challenge.

Strategic Actions

- 11 We're redefining library and I.T. organizations to thrive in the post-"sole provider" era.
- 12 We're engaging our community, building relationships with other academic support units, attempting to be visible, and trying to communicate well. We're increasing collaboration with peer institutions.
- 13 We're turning to a re-working of the traditional library "liaison" role as one way we'll integrate with the community.
- 14 We're advocating for a climate that can encourage and reward risk-taking.
- 15 To better understand our users, we're incorporating qualitative research into the ways we gather data for decision-making.