

# The Academic Library and the Re-imagination of Undergraduate Education

By Cheryl B. Truesdell

In July 2010 the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) launched its "Red Balloon Project: Re-Imagining Undergraduate Education" (Mehaffy, 2010). The inspiration for the Red Balloon moniker came from a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) contest that challenged any individual or team to be the first to locate ten red weather balloons placed in random locations throughout the United States. The \$40,000 reward was won by a team from MIT in 8 hours and 52 minutes using the Internet, social networking, shared expertise, and team work. In his white paper introducing the Red Balloon initiative, George L. Mehaffy (2010), AASCU's Vice President for Academic Leadership and Change, argues that this experiment captures the essence of his thesis that higher education is in crisis and must use its collective wisdom to reinvent institutional structures in order to meet the demands of teaching and learning in the information age.

Mehaffy characterizes public universities as outmoded institutions still faithful to an 11<sup>th</sup> century model in which information is delivered by experts (professors) and passively, even reverentially received by non-experts (students). This process of delivering core content is replicated in many classrooms at many universities across the country. He argues that declining funding, rising expectations for more college graduates, and rapidly developing technology requires a fundamental restructuring of the current expensive, non-scalable model of academic enterprise to scalable high-quality education models for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs began the fall 2010 semester with a challenge to faculty, librarians, deans,

and academic administrators to envision new models of institutional organization, enrollment management, faculty work, curriculum requirements, and course and instructional design. In spite of its emphasis on the changes technology has made on information transfer, neither libraries or librarians were mentioned as models of change in the AASCU Red Balloon article. Librarians at IPFW recognized the challenges identified in the Red Balloon article and felt particularly qualified to join the debate. In the spring IPFW Helmke librarians drafted a response to AASCU's white paper on re-imagining undergraduate education adding the academic librarian perspective to the debate on the future of higher education in the United States.

IPFW library's document, Red Balloon and Re-Imagining Academic Librarianship (2011), attempts to address all three of the challenges facing undergraduate education today as identified by AASCU's Red Balloon Project - declining funding; rising expectations regarding college completion; and rapidly developing technology - framed from the point of view of academic librarianship. Our response focused on maximizing campus resources through effective use of library facilities and resources, developing the Learning Commons as a significant teaching and learning space outside the classroom that promotes problem-solving, project-based learning, undergraduate research, and working with faculty to deploy new technology effectively in teaching and learning, especially as it relates to information literacy.

What follows is a copy of our document updated with author comments a year into its development.

## Red Balloon and Re-imagining Academic Librarianship

### Propositions

1.1 We assert that *librarians and libraries* play a key role in assuring that higher education institutions like IPFW *will meet the challenge to provide a more accessible, affordable, and high-quality undergraduate education.*

While this may seem like an unnecessary statement, we noted that AASCU's white paper devotes considerable attention to the impact of technology and the new information environment on how faculty and students acquire, evaluate, use, and create new information, but libraries and librarians are not mentioned anywhere in the document. In fact, IPFW was the first (and only) AASCU institution at the time to introduce the academic library as a valuable partner in re-inventing higher education.

1.2 Deploying *librarian expertise* in partnership with the teaching faculty *will directly and indirectly support student learning.*

AASCU recognizes the importance of information literacy (although they don't call it that) in re-imagining undergraduate education. Mehaffy argues in his Red Balloon article "that technology – the Internet, search capacities like Google, and our ability to find, aggregate, and use information in new, networked, more powerful ways – represents a profound challenge to the university as we know it" (p. 2). We assert that librarians are uniquely qualified to work with faculty to teach students how to find, evaluate, and use information effectively and ethically.

1.3 Reconceiving the purpose and uses of a *well-designed library facility* to create collaborative spaces outside of the traditional classroom *will foster student engagement.*

In a re-imagined undergraduate education, faculty spend less time in the classroom delivering content and more time designing effective educational experiences.

Repurposed library space, offered as a place that encourages out-of-class learning, collaboration, and informal exchange of ideas, is ideal for these experiences to take place.

### Assumptions

2.1 *A program of information literacy instruction integrated within the general-education curriculum* is critical to the success of students who must possess the skills to adapt to a complex, fast-changing information environment.

The pressure from constituencies other than librarians to integrate information literacy into the curriculum is increasing. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise) initiative has identified information literacy as one of its Essential Learning Outcomes. The Lumina Foundation's *Degree Qualifications Profile, Defining Degrees* (2010) released in January 2011 includes information literacy concepts in all five of its areas of learning and for all levels of education from associate through master's degrees. No less than the President of the United States has recognized the importance of information literacy declaring October as Information Literacy Awareness Month. This is our opportunity to re-imagine information literacy education (not library skills training) with our faculty partners.

2.2 *A virtual space and physical place in a secure campus setting* where students can find and make effective use of academic-support services is critical to student learning, engagement, and success.

*Transformational Times: An Environmental Scan Prepared for the ARL Strategic Plan Review Task Force* (2009) notes that libraries have been able to demonstrate that their facilities are the logical providers

of primary learning spaces on campus, and they have been successful in creating undergraduate learning commons that are popular destinations for productivity and learning. It also urges academic libraries to increase services and resources available within virtual environments where students and faculty live, work, and play (p. 16-17).

*2.3 A clear understanding and accurate portrayal of IPFW students' particular needs and challenges* is critical to designing an integrated, discipline-based, valid assessment program, measured in terms of improved rates of persistence and attainment.

Academic libraries are being pressured to answer to new "value-centric" standards that demonstrate the library's impact on the academic success of students and faculty. *The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report* (ACRL, 2010) was prepared to help academic libraries articulate their value to the institution by assessing their impact on university goals such as student enrollment, retention and graduation rates, student learning, faculty research productivity, faculty grant proposals and funding, and faculty teaching.

### **Expanded Roles for Academic Librarians**

*3.1 Librarians have a distinctive role to play in teaching and validating the acquisition of information literacy proficiencies*, which represents more of a process than a set of discrete skills. These proficiencies include being able to know what information is needed for a given task, select the best source of information, develop strategies to locate and retrieve relevant information, critically evaluate the information, organize and use information ethically to accomplish stated goals, and communicate the results effectively. Information literacy in a disciplinary context, along with technological and numerical literacy, is fundamental to

the aspirations of IPFW's Baccalaureate Framework (IPFW Faculty Senate, 2006).

Most academic library introductory information literacy courses or individual instruction sessions are still rooted in a training-skill-based model. Information literacy is much more than knowing how to use a specific interface at any given point in time. Recent studies of undergraduate research skills reveal that our undergraduate digital natives are not digital savvy and that librarians would do better to start with basic information literacy concepts tied to the tools they (the students) are already using so ineffectively. *Redefining the Academic Library: Managing the Migration to Digital Information Services*, prepared by the University Leadership Council, (2011), a non-library think tank, encourages librarians "to refocus student session on the inner workings of Google and Wikipedia, encouraging students to be better lifelong judges of information and better users of common search tools" (p. xii). In the new paradigm librarians "think like educators not service providers" (Long & Schonfeld, 2010, p. 21).

*3.2 Librarians need to be unbound from the physical library to work with students and the teaching faculty* wherever they congregate, in academic departments, classrooms, and informal settings. With so many resources available electronically, librarians can deploy and demonstrate the effective use of mobile technologies while interacting with students in cafés, hallways, laboratories, and any number of relevant sites where students like to meet and study.

In re-imagining undergraduate education, AASCU encourages faculty to delegate the delivery of basic information to prepackaged content readily available from other sources and concentrate their efforts in designing activities for working with students outside the classroom. ARL's *Transformational Times* (2009) calls for librarians to do the same: spend less time in classrooms and lecture halls and more

time creating learning objects, tutorials, video and multimedia-based instruction components and asynchronous instruction (p. 16-17).

*3.3 Liaison librarians use their combined information science and subject knowledge to teach, one on one and in the classroom, in coordination with the faculty.*

Faculty and librarians share the same goal of integrating information literacy teaching and learning into the curriculum. In *Redefining the Academic Library* (University, 2011), administrators recommend redeploying library staff as embedded e-Librarians or departmental informationists. Librarians could split time between library and departments, sit in on departmental meetings, conduct systematic literature reviews for grant proposals, and work with faculty to integrate information literacy into the curriculum (p. xii).

*3.4 Librarians are the campus' master collaborators and networkers, joining forces long ago to maximize resources and increase access to valuable information for the benefit of their community of learners. Through state, regional, and national networks they continue to combine talents and expertise to provide innovative services and resources responsive to the needs of a broad spectrum of faculty and students. A few examples of this kind of creativity unleashed include innovations such as seamless information discovery and delivery systems, collaborative online reference services available 24/7, customized one-on-one research consulting, open-access digital collections of valued local content and those that showcase faculty and student scholarship, and information literacy applications for courseware or mobile devices.*

A major premise of AASCU's Red Balloon project is that funding for higher education is static or declining and that universities will have to learn how to do more with less. This is a challenge that academic

libraries have faced for years. Libraries are leaders in collaborative arrangements that maximize resources and who better to model the use of collective wisdom to create new tools and structures for a reconceived undergraduate education.

## **Changing Roles for Academic Library Buildings**

*4.1 The brick-and-mortar library remains the most significant campus learning environment outside the classroom.* Today's academic library offers a discipline-neutral, non-threatening virtual and physical space replete with human, technological, and research resources.

The success of library efforts to repurpose space to support collaborative learning may result in pressures to accept new tenants and services that do not enhance the library and its learning commons mission to support research, teaching, and learning. Assessment data that documents the impact of these spaces on student academic success is critical (*Transformational Times*, 2009, p. 17).

*4.2 The library is an ideal environment for engaged learning opportunities to take place, such as undergraduate research forums, group projects, workshops, lectures, seminars, and coffee and book chats. Simply by observing and being part of the dynamic energy that permeates a busy library can lead students to greater involvement and academic success. The mentoring role of students employed as peer-teachers may also be demonstrated most dramatically in the library-learning commons context.*

While the library learning commons has realized much success in providing reinvigorated space for student learning, faculty have not yet flocked to the space to engage with students in teaching and learning activities outside the classroom. This is the next challenge for libraries, to promote its facilities to faculty as an environment outside the classroom to

conduct more meaningful interactions with students.

*4.3 The physical library building must be fully integrated with virtual learning spaces to deliver the array of skills students need to succeed in the 21st century. Combining writing, research, and technology consultants together in a unified physical/virtual setting is the right approach to take.*

Our students and faculty work in the virtual environment even as they inhabit the physical library space. The challenge is for librarians is to spend more time creating quality online products and services that meet their teaching and learning needs.

### **Next Steps to Reimagining Academic Librarianship**

*5.1 Develop the physical IPFW Learning Commons to articulate with the new Student Services Complex, incorporating a unified information desk staffed by student employees and professionals, an innovative classroom for teaching information literacy and technology skills, schedulable small-group study and seminar rooms, semi-private research- and writing-consulting cubicles, and an appealing café environment that encourages students to study alone or in groups. Cross-training for all staff, especially student employees, will be a critical component to its success.*

In November 2011 IPFW's 44.2 million dollar student services complex, which includes a 260-foot long, 30-foot wide glass enclosed sky bridge addition to the Helmke Library second floor Learning Commons, opened its doors. To date the IPFW Learning Commons includes student peer information services, librarian consulting services, writing center consultation, laptop checkouts, group study rooms, a mid-sized conference room, fireplace, some new soft furniture selected by students, seven large study bays equipped with white boards, movable tables and chairs, electrical outlets, and updated wireless. Phase two of the Learning Commons is underway with

plans for a café, multi-media lab, teaching-learning classroom, more student access computing group and single workstations, and the possible addition of the campus Honors program.

*5.2 Develop the virtual IPFW Learning Commons to feature a range of online services and mobile technologies that support accessibility in its broadest sense, including access to online resources, contacts with liaison librarians, systems to schedule time to meet with librarians, writing consultants, and technology trainers, systems to reserve laptops and group-study rooms, and other emerging needs based on student use and feedback.*

The virtual Learning Commons is a work in progress. No single web portal has been implemented yet, but individual units in the Learning Commons are continuing to design and offer virtual services for students and faculty, including IM and email reference, online writing center appointments, and mobile interfaces for Learning Commons hours, computer and study room availability, online course guides, and some library databases. Work continues to design a single Learning Commons web portal, identify a mutually acceptable online calendar and scheduling system, and select and/or develop apps for iPhones and iPads.

*5.3 Design a research project involving 2-3 liaison librarians to learn more about the information-access and teaching-learning issues facing beginning students and their instructors by meeting with them in their departments, classrooms, and the Learning Commons, with the ultimate aim of providing more relevant instruction and support for the first 30 hours of credit classes in an effort to increase retention beyond the first year.*

In the fall of 2011, IPFW's office of Academic Affairs launched its *Re-Imagining IPFW's Academic Future: Mobile Technology Initiative*. Through a grant process, faculty

and librarians could apply for an iPad to be used to enhance teaching and learning. All grant recipients were required to attend a training session, meet and work within a randomly selected cohort group throughout the semester to share mobile technology successes and failures, and present an individual report at the end of the semester on lessons learned from the use of the iPad for teaching and learning. All information services and instruction librarians now have iPads and are part of the campus iPad faculty cohort groups. Several librarians received their iPads through the grant process and others received theirs through a joint purchase collaboration between the library administration and the Deans or Department Chairs of the liaison librarians' academic departments. Librarians are now actively engaged with faculty in exploring how the iPad can enhance, support and/or transform teaching, research, and scholarship and cross-discipline collaboration at IPFW. As part of the mobile technology initiative, librarians have developed an online guide to the best educational apps for the iPad as identified by IPFW faculty. The library's libguide covers apps from note-taking to citation management to GradebookPro as well as apps by discipline (App-Ed). In addition, the library's Emerging Technology librarian provides reviews of helpful apps each month in the library's newsletter *Helmke Highlights*.

*5.4 Deploy 1-2 liaison librarians as half-time appointments in selected academic departments and schools or colleges to further the goal of validating knowledge about IPFW's community of learners, shifting the emphasis from recording service encounters to measuring indicators of student engagement within their majors and its correlated increase in degree completion.*

The librarians at IPFW do not have half-time appointments in academic departments yet. However, librarians have taken steps to become more involved in the academic

life of their departments. The Business librarian is a member of School of Business Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and the Health and Human Services librarian has co-designed and co-teaches the graduate nursing informatics course. A half-time appointment for librarians in one or two departments has been broached with the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and deans and the idea has raised some interest. The time may come soon when we can experiment with this arrangement.

*5.5 Pilot a project in the library to supply and evaluate the use of appropriate mobile devices for delivery of enhanced e-textbooks, to realize a more interactive learning experience and cost savings for students, to be executed in coordination with Follett's Bookstore and Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), with funding from Indiana-Purdue Student Government Association (IPSGA). This project is an example of the kind of responsive collaboration and ready adoption of emerging technologies that academic librarians are typically eager to undertake, if given the adequate means to support a new program, define its goals, and validate the outcomes.*

Over one-third of IPFW faculty now have iPads as part of the *Re-Imagining IPFW's Academic Future: Mobile Technology Initiative* (see above) and are beginning to develop courses built around mobile devices. The library, Academic Success Center, and CELT have collaborated on an IPSGA grant request to purchase 80-100 iPads to be made available to students for a semester (rental) or short-term (free checkout). This proposal has had preliminary approval by the IPSGA board. In addition the administration will be piloting a few e-textbook only sections during the summer session of 2012.

Last year IPFW's academic Vice Chancellor challenged faculty to question traditional faculty approaches to teaching, learning and scholarship. The traditional academic library

would not see an active role for librarians in this discussion, but the re-defined academic library is vital to a re-imagined undergraduate education. Who is more qualified than academic librarians to integrate information literacy education into the curriculum? What facility is better positioned to create spaces outside the classroom where engaged teaching and learning can take place? And where can higher education administrators find better models for maximizing resources than successful collaborations of library administrators in database licensing, shared collection storage, or collaborative digitization projects to name a few? The library of course!

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## Bio

Cheryl B. Truesdell is Dean of the Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) Helmke Library and has achieved full rank. Her expertise and professional interests include strategic planning, building digital library collections, resource sharing, copyright law, U.S. government information services, and Open Access Scholarly Communication. She has been active in Indiana libraries and library organizations since 1980, serving in leadership roles in the American Library Association, the Indiana State Library Advisory Council, Indiana Government Documents Organization, INDIGO, and the Indiana Library Federation. She has also been active in a number of Indiana University Libraries system-wide committees. She has published articles in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *Indiana Libraries*, and *DTTP: Documents to the People*, and has been a presenter at state, regional, and national conferences. In her spare time, Ms. Truesdell indulges in her love for gardening and mystery novels.