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The Recession Mounts the Ivory Tower: How the Lillian Goldman Law Library at Yale has met the Challenges Posed by a Declining Economy

Abstract: The global recession has wrought havoc on the budgets of libraries worldwide, forcing administrators to reassess priorities and change direction midcourse. Privately funded academic libraries which typically rely heavily on large endowments have not been exempt and in fact have probably been hit the hardest. The challenges encountered by this long drawn financial crisis have ultimately provided opportunities to reassess priorities and conduct business more efficiently. This paper was presented at the BIALL Conference in June 2010 by Femi Cadmus and Blair Kaufmann.
Keywords: academic law libraries; United States; budgets; recession

Introduction

This paper examines how one institution, the Lillian Goldman Law Library at Yale Law School, known for its first class unique library collection and progressive and innovative approaches to library services, bravely faces the challenges of a declining economy and reduced budgets. No stone has been left untouched in the quest to achieve savings while at the same time maintaining the library's central mission to provide first rate unparalleled support and access to information resources to our faculty and students.

At the close of 2008, the library received stunning news from the law school and university administration that its personnel, collections and general operating expenses had to be reduced by upwards of fifteen per cent. We found little comfort in the fact that our situation was not unique. A survey conducted by the American Association of Law Libraries in March 2009 revealed at the time that 60 per cent of the responding law libraries in the United States had experienced some form of budget cuts translating into staff reductions, hiring freezes and furloughs.[1] A follow-up survey in October 2009[2] revealed that the economic picture was less severe but staff and budget cuts continued and exceeded any type of growth. While the survey indicated that private firms appear to be the hardest hit, academic law libraries have certainly not been immune to the effects of the global recession. Many law school libraries rely on tuition revenue and, in the case of state institutions, government funding to underwrite their budgets. A select few law schools derive a substantial portion of their budgets from tuition, endowment and gift income. The latter include a curious mix of "quasi public" law schools, such as the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Michigan. A larger number of leading private institutions, including Ivy League institutions such as Harvard and Yale, heavily depend on endowment and donor support and perhaps ironically have been harder hit by the declining economy.[3] At some of the premier private law schools in the United States, endowments have grown substantially over the past several decades and their reliance on endowment income expanded proportionately. For example, at Yale endowment income replaced tuition as the single largest source of revenue during the decade preceding the financial crisis and together with annual giving expanded to the point that it accounted for well over half of the total law school budget at the time of the economic meltdown.

After assimilating news of the cuts, the law librarian and members of the library's Executive Committee

(which advises the law librarian regarding library policies and procedures) immediately started the process of identifying how to accomplish this gargantuan task without sacrificing the core values and mission of the law library. The step by step process for identifying which parts of the library's services were modifiable or altogether disposable will be discussed.

Revisiting the library's mission statement and strategic plan

The first step was to keep both the mission of the library and its current strategic plan in perspective whilst also bearing in mind that adjustments might have to be made along the way. The mission as articulated in the library's strategic plan states:

> "In support of Yale Law School's outstanding educational and scholarly programs and the University's global mission, the Lillian Goldman Law Library is dedicated to acquiring and preserving a superb collection of resources in the best formats available, exploiting technology and creating innovative programs to the greatest benefit of our users, providing the most highly competent assistance and instruction for using our information resources and maintaining a welcoming, comfortable facility.
>
> Guiding Principles:
>
> - Understand the changes and trends in legal education and the legal profession.
> - Understand the changing and diverse needs of our patrons, both local and remote.
> - Flexibility and adaptability in response to rapidly changing needs and technologies for service.
> - Promote and use the best resources.
> - Recruit and promote the best-qualified people to support excellent service to the Yale Law School and University communities.
> - Represent the Library's ethic of honesty, integrity and trust".

The crux of the library's mission, as we understand it, hinges on serving the information needs of our constituents. Our rich collections and exploitation of technology are built around this service mentality. We also recognise that we are more than a service unit and distinguish our library from some other very good law school libraries by the historical depth and contemporary richness of our collections. The challenge facing us was how to continue providing first rate services, while maintaining the best possible access to strong information resources during a time of rapidly plunging budgets.

Meetings with Stakeholders

It was paramount that we arranged informative and consultative meetings with our stakeholders to exchange vital information during this process.

The Dean and Law School Administrators

The law library director regularly meets the law school's top administrators, and separately with the dean. We found these sessions especially important during the budgetary crisis and used them to ensure that there was a free flow and exchange of information. While we had always enjoyed the support of law school administration, it was paramount to emphasise and reiterate the indispensability of our core library services as outlined above and how those services depend on library information resources. As librarians, we know that information resources are increasingly expensive, yet there is a widespread belief (almost wishful in nature) that the digital age has made information less costly or even free. Thus, it may seem to well-meaning university administrators that information budgets can be cut without harming services. This point was raised by a top administrator at one of our meetings and we were able to correct this misperception and demonstrate that online information, in fact, is often more expensive than its print equivalents. This myth continues to haunt law libraries For example, to help stem a budgetary shortfall in Connecticut, the state proposed closing six courthouse libraries. The justification for these closures is that most attorneys can conduct effective legal research online and no longer need libraries. This attitude was reflected in a statement made by the President of the New London County Bar Association in which he said:

> "To be honest, you hate to see a resource [like a law library] dry up. But you're seeing that more and more, these online options like Google can be obtained for free. If our firm is any indication, people are reducing their hardbound resources. It may be that [closing a law library] is not going to be perceived as a terrible thing."[4]

As most librarians know, the labyrinth of electronic information has made research more complex and users are confronted with a multitude of choices in varying formats and interfaces. Navigating one's way through these resources can be likened to kayaking through rapids. Another misconception is the role and function of the professional librarian in the digital era. Those who lack specialised research skills may not understand their value and relevance in the age of deceptively simple search engines like Google. Listen carefully to what is said and be prepared take advantage of teachable moments to rectify this misperception. The exponential

nature of online information has placed a higher demand on our professional librarians to organise the information resources and provide even more in-depth research instruction and assistance to patrons.

Students

While we were unable to immediately meet our students, we drew on earlier surveys and focus groups conducted with students. We gathered student input both through online surveys (which we find get a high response when students are offered a chance to win something as simple as an iPod Shuffle) and through focus groups. Results from the surveys and focus groups have allowed us to keep a pulse on the needs of our students. These results were also central to decisions made to modify library services in light of the budget cuts. It also averted any big and unpleasant surprises to the student body. Once we had some decisions in mind that were likely to affect students, we shared this information with the Faculty Library Committee, which includes two student representatives.

Faculty

In addition to meeting the Faculty Library Committee, faculty input is solicited regularly through one-on-one interviews conducted by librarians and through our established library faculty liaison program. One problem with getting meaningful input from the Library Committee is the difficulty in pulling everyone together for a meeting and once a meeting occurs it is easy to get diverted. In a relatively small law school like Yale, it has proven easier to get useful information from the one-on-one interview process, which provides us with a fairly strong sense of what is important to the faculty. Conducting such targeted interviews has helped us to focus our services in areas with the greatest needs.

Library professional and support staff

We resolved from the outset to be as transparent as possible and to keep the entire library staff apprised of developments in the budget reduction process. Soon after the first announcement of budget cuts, we scheduled a meeting with the entire staff to alert them of anticipated changes and promised to keep them informed with additional meetings as we learned more. This was the first in a series of three or four meetings we conducted for all staff throughout the semester in our effort to keep them informed. Our situation at Yale is a little delicate as most of our support staff belong to a union and working relations are governed by a union contract. As a result we could not simply proceed with general meetings but had to lean heavily on our central human resources and labour relations units for advice on staying within union contractual stipulations. Our intent was to communicate to our staff as much as was reasonably possible and let them know that we were reviewing processes and functions which had either ceased or could be modified or suspended during the budget crunch. It was crucial that the process was not seen as simply a means of eliminating positions, but as a means of achieving the greatest efficiency in constrained times. We also solicited suggestions from our staff as to how best to weather the crunch and received several useful suggestions, ranging from suggestions for reducing waste to reduced work schedules. At the end of the day we were able to keep the process as participatory as possible within the bounds of contractual rules.

Analysing and reviewing the collection policy

Earlier modifications to our collection development policy articulated a preference for online over print for current awareness materials. We embarked on a path to more aggressively drop print serials several years prior to the budget crunch in order to have the necessary funds to continue our expansion of digital resources and maintain a strong print monograph budget. Without such changes in collecting practices, most law library collection budgets would be swallowed by print continuation increases, which far exceed the modest increases in funding each year. We had already embarked in changes in our collection development policy that called for cutting print serials in order to direct more funds towards digital resources and continue investing in foreign print monographs and rare books. We also chose not to renew our library maintenance program contract, which obligated us to continue a large number of print publications with a major publisher and this gave us more flexibility to reassess our collecting commitments.

The 2009 AALL Economic Outlook Survey results[5] listed what other libraries were doing in the area of collections to cope:

- Looking at all print subscriptions very closely, cancelling those that we can
- Watching online usage of databases carefully to determine which subscriptions not to renew as well as renegotiate
- Cancelling overlapping or duplicate titles
- Freezing the book budget; any new purchases must be countered by a cancellation of similar cost
- Renegotiating contracts with large publishers

Our rare book collection remains one of our strong suits and the jewel of our library collection. We resolved to continue to seek acquisition opportunities in this area within the limits of our current financial constraints. Regrettably we had to suspend our manuscripts and archives activity but have every intention of reinstating the program when the economy improves. We are also

seeking to collect more collaboratively with our peer libraries and to reduce the incidence of unnecessary duplication of resources. This collaboration is fostered and nutured on the regional level through library consortia and academic libraries groups such as the Northeast Foreign Law Librarians Group (NEFLLCG). The library continues to leverage its collection and increase accessibility to its rich materials by continuing its collaborative activity with private enterprise mostly through digitisation of rare books and materials. For example, we are continuing our work with the Gale Company to participate in the fourth module of the Making of Modern Law drawn largely from the collections of the Yale Law Library. This will benefit researchers of legal history and continues our mission of making our rich information resources widely accessible.

Library personnel reorganisation, training and development

With our collections budget severely cut, the huge cancellation of serials and a corresponding drop in bindery activity, the effects of the library's reorganisation was felt deeply by our Technical Services department. Some positions became redundant in light of our cancellations of serials. These included serials check-in, cataloguing and bindery activities. We strove to limit our personnel reductions to activity which had ceased or had become dispensable. Nonetheless the process was very difficult morale wise and it was complicated by a contractual rule requiring us to continue employment for 90 days after notification (without allowing pay in lieu of work), but the transparency of the process helped to ease tensions.

Additional personnel savings were also accomplished through voluntary reduction in schedules, with some staff deciding on this route as a means of achieving work life balance. Another means of realising personnel savings was through attrition and some support positions are yet to be filled. This has fostered a significant amount of cross-training and collaboration between departments. For example our circulation assistants also provide assistance in faculty services and technology. In a way this has also been a boon for support staff who find themselves learning different and challenging skills.

In keeping with our mission to recruit and promote the best-qualified people to support excellent service to the law school and university, we continue to provide support (albeit reduced) for professional development travel and encourage active professional engagement by our librarians both locally and nationally. Our professional librarians have also taken advantage of the proliferation and increased availability of library related webinars. The library's programme committee also provides opportunities for our staff, librarians and invited speakers to promote, present and attend programs hosted by the library.

Impact on other Library Services

Our communications with student and faculty provided the much needed information we required to determine the future of other library services, such as hours of operation, research instruction and document delivery. We referred to our patron statistics to determine if, and to what extent, we could cut back on our hours of operation. As a result we were able to cut back some late night hours without any negative impact on our students' library use. In terms of research instruction, our research librarians continue to offer a full slate of introductory and advanced legal research classes. Specialised research classes are offered in areas in which there is demonstrable interest. Document delivery services rose significantly as the library collaborated with other university libraries to satisfy the research needs of our users. We elected to discontinue participating in a shared interlibrary loan program with some academic libraries as our borrowing statistics coupled with the expense did not justify a continuation.

Post reorganisation efforts

While the library has not undertaken a major reorganisation, there have certainly been major changes in personnel (especially in our Technical Services department) where support positions were eliminated or remain unfilled. Overall, employees are increasingly working in a collaborative fashion and are being cross-trained to perform expanded duties. We have found that the key to achieving the right balance is not to overburden existing employees, but to determine what functions are essential and central to our mission. We continue to maintain open discussions with employees on the front lines, one-on-one and by way of meetings, as how best to accomplish our goals as a library. We also surveyed our employees on current library services and the anonymity of the process generated candid and helpful viewpoints. Visibility, approachability and accessibility of managers remain essential during difficult times when employees are being encouraged to be flexible and adaptable. We have also found it essential to continue to maintain a dialogue with our key constituents, faculty and students to determine what their changing needs are. It has certainly helped immensely that we are in a new strategic planning cycle during which our overall mission and goals are being re-examined and reassessed. In conclusion, flexibility and adaptability remain vital in advancing the library's mission in difficult times. Collaboration with peer libraries, consortia and library related organisations cannot be token gestures or mere lip service, but must be implemented vigorously to ensure the sustainability of essential library programs and services.

Footnotes

[1]AALL Economic Outlook Survey 2009 http://aallnet.pbworks.com/f/Economic_Outlook_Survey_Results_April09.pdf

[2]AALL Economic Outlook follow-up Survey October 2009 http://aallnet.pbworks.com/f/Comparative+Summary.pdf

[3]The Yale Daily News reported that Harvard's endowment dropped by 30 percent and Yale's by 30.4 percent in the 2009 fiscal year. Zuckerman, Esther "Harvard's Endowment sees Sharp Decline" (11th Sep 2009) Yale Daily News http://www.yaledaily-news.com/news/university-news/2009/09/11/harvards-endowment-sees-sharp-decline/

[4]Malan, Douglas S. "The Final Chapter for Court Libraries?" (25th Nov 2009) Connecticut Law Tribune http://www.law.com/jsp/lawtechnologynews/PubArticleLTN.jsp?id=1202435819329

[5]http://aallnet.pbworks.com/Examples-from-Law-Libraries

Biographies

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Making the Right Investment – Recruitment and Selection

Abstract: This article is based on the presentation given by Suzanne Wheatley at the BIALL Conference in June 2010 giving advice to prospective interviewers on how to make the best recruitment decisions.
Keywords: employment; recruitment

Introduction

There is much written about the process of finding a job. Much of our time at Sue Hill Recruitment (SHR) is spent helping job seekers (our candidates) present themselves in the best possible light when applying for roles. In 2008 and 2009 we delivered training workshops on how to write an effective CV, tackling application forms and successful interview techniques. When the call for abstracts was made by BIALL for their 2010 Conference, I saw the theme was Managing Resources in Difficult Times and my thoughts immediately turned to the effectiveness of recruiting and retaining staff. Your staff are your greatest resource – both in terms of knowledge but also, in some cases, in terms of spend. Are you making the right investment?

The aim for my session at the Conference was to facilitate a discussion of best practice in recruitment and to discover how colleagues within the information world overcome objections to hiring staff in these straitened times. As a recruiter, it is a joy to work on a vacancy with both a communicative human resources professional and a participative and passionate recruiting line manager in the same company. This is not always the case and so I went in search of those good relationships and asked how they made it work. I am indebted to my colleagues in the information industry who gave their time to talk about their recruitment successes and, where there have been failures, how they made sure it did not happen again.