Aligned

An academic library's strategic plan in response to institutional goals

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University libraries in Africa are facing challenging times due to new ways of generating, storing, disseminating and consuming information. However, far from diverting the libraries' focus on delivering effective services to the academic communities they serve, these challenges are rather stimulating them to develop and adopt new strategies in order to improve library services, and to ensure they can meet these for changing needs.

Once hailed as the "heart of the university", the library today is competing with other academic and support service providers in the university for resources and recognition. As part of their contribution to enabling academic excellence in African universities, libraries are continuing to justify their roles as true academic partners in the teaching and research process. Addressing the questions of relevance, value and impact of the library within an African university is a task that the university librarian must continue to articulate and assert within the university community. This means making a strong case for adequate resources to run the library, gaining acceptance as a key academic partner and clearly demonstrating the value of the library.

A university's executive management wants to see the link between institutional strategic goals and academic support services, including the library. Evidently the library's strategic plan cannot achieve its goals if it does not respond to institutional goals. But how do libraries remain aligned with institutional objectives in order to demonstrate their relevance to university communities?

This article shows how the library at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in South Africa has responded to this challenge, supporting institutional excellence through a clear and focused plan which is already delivering on its goals.

Linking the library's strategic plan to institutional objectives

The vision of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) is "to be at the heart of technology education in Africa". Like any other modern university, CPUT strives to provide a vibrant learning environment, recruit excellent lecturers and researchers, and provide adequate resources to its staff and students. The goals of the university are contained in its strategic plan "Vision 2020" and the process by which this developed is coordinated by an Institutional Strategic Planning Committee (ISP) made up of senior university management, including the library director.

Reporting to the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the library at CPUT has a direct academic line reporting structure. The library has a seat in key university committees such as the Senate, Deans' Forum, Academic Planning Committee, Senate Research Committee, Teaching and Learning, Institutional Quality Assurance, Faculty Boards and others relevant to the delivery of services to the university community.

In response to institutional strategic goals, the library uses its presence in these key committees to demonstrate its relevance, scan the university environment, interact with key stakeholders and continuously align its planning processes. In line with CPUT's vision the library's main goal is "to be the innovative leading information partner enabling the institution to be at the centre of technology education in Africa".

For each of the university's goals the library has formulated its own goal in response.

University's strategic goals	Library's aligned goals
Sustainability and efficiency	To position the library in supporting technology education in Africa
The curriculum, teaching and learning	To position the library in the learning process of students and better engage teaching staff with library services
The student experience	To align library provision to broad institutional student experience activities and initiatives
Research and innovation	To support problem solving , user inspired research, institutional scholarly communication and technology transfer to the private sector, government and civil society

Library operational plans

In order to coordinate with the library's strategic plan, operational plans are then used as implementation tools to manage and monitor service delivery. Each line manager,

including the library director, deputy library director and section heads are required to produce an annual operational work plan. These plans are first discussed with staff in the various units to ensure that each and every member of the library staff provides their input into the planning of operations in their respective unit for the specified year. The operational plans are thus an extension of the library's response to the institutional strategic goals and are linked to staff Performance Management Contracts

In response to faculties' strategic goals, CPUT Library's Faculty and Research Information Services Managers also align their operational plans with faculties' objectives. This clearly demonstrates that the library's work does not just end with the overarching institutional strategic goals, but rather permeates down to faculty and departmental levels ensuring that student and faculty's information needs are met. The library's own internal Quality Improvement Plan which is a response to internal self-reviews and governmental institutional quality audits, documents all its responses. The Library's quality plan also serves as a mechanism to keep records in order to track the library's response to future government and internal audits and compliance with institutional goals.

In order to ensure that the library's strategic goals are in line with national and international practices and that systems are in line with global trends, the library regularly scans the wider environment to identify appropriate benchmarks, and participates in various national and international forums in order to remain relevant in the global scholarly communication environment. Visits by the library management to other national and international academic libraries have helped CPUT libraries to reconfigure its services for the benefit of the university community.

Monitoring and compliance with institutional goals

An internal monitoring mechanism has been put in place through the establishment of the post and office of the Quality Assurance Librarian. The office monitors the library's response to its own strategic and operational plans in line with institutional goals. It provides progress reports to the library's executive committee members. The work of this office has also been enhanced through the design and implementation of an in-house statistical database that provides evidence on the use of library facilities to library management for planning and operational improvements. The Library's Quality Assurance office works closely with the institutional Quality Assurance and Institutional Strategic Planning units for guidance on compliance with institutional improvement matters and staff and student satisfaction surveys respectively.

Monitoring of the library's work is also reinforced through Performance Management Contracts. With this system, each member of staff agrees with their line manager on deliverables for each particular year. The PMCs are closely aligned to the operational plans which are derived from the library's strategic goals. During the course of the year, review meetings are held to ensure that each staff member remains within the agreed work plan.

The library has come up with a "Special Skills" programme to ensure that staff remains skilled in their various jobs. The library has requested for a ring fenced special training budget to cover specialist areas that are not normally covered by the university's learning and development programme. As a specialist unit, the library requires that staff to keep up-to-date with developments in their areas of work Some of the specialist training areas included in this programme are; statistics literacy for librarians, managing finance, diversity and change management, presentation skills, research data curation and management, research and writing skills and use of qualitative and quantitative tools for data analysis in the library's research and evaluation activities. The special skills programme was developed through extensive consultation with line managers who will have identified areas of training need during performance management contracts negotiation with their staff. The training librarian then coordinates the delivery of the programme through the identification of experienced and credible service providers and at times uses skills within the library and the university.

Conclusion

Aligning the library's strategic plan to institutional goals and scaling it down the organization to operational plans has worked well for CPUT Libraries. Annual feedback sessions with faculties, involvement of all library staff in responding to institutional goals and crafting of the library's strategic objectives and operational plans, as well as the results of first year student surveys on university academic support services, have all shown high levels of satisfaction with library services. The involvement of the library in international associations of scientific and technological university libraries show its commitment to promoting the university's technology education drive and this enables it to stay up to date with current thinking and practices in academic libraries. Demonstrating the value of the library to the university community is an ongoing activity and it is more than just a commitment but practically useful for its programmes. Continuing professional development of library staff through the library's "Special Skills" development programme ensures relevance of the library's service to the university community. Librarians in African universities must build and retain a cadre that understands how library goals are derived from institutional objectives and through this they will contribute to the enablement of academic excellence in their institutions. To achieve this they will need strong support from institutional leaders.