

Development Trends of Innovative Services in the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award: Implications and Recommendations for Chinese Libraries (Postprint)

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Date: 2023-08-27T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study examines the selection criteria of the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award and the distinctive innovative services of award-winning libraries, aiming to grasp current trends in international academic library innovation and development, and to provide insights and references for the development of innovative services in Chinese academic libraries. [Method/Process] Using a combination of web-based investigation and literature review, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the distinctive innovative services of libraries that received the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award between 2000 and 2017, as well as typical case studies of two libraries, to summarize and organize the developmental trajectory of library innovative services. [Results/Conclusion] From the perspectives of library service strategic planning, novel teaching activities, user feedback evaluation, institutional collaborative partnerships, and staff career development, this paper proposes insights and recommendations that can serve as references for Chinese academic libraries.

Full Text

Preamble

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study examines the selection criteria of the ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award and the distinctive innovative services of award-winning libraries to identify current trends in international academic library innovation and development, providing insights and references for the development of innovative services in Chinese university libraries. **[Method/Process]** Using a combination of web-based and literature research, this paper analyzes the innovative services of 53 award-winning libraries from 2000-2017, with in-depth case studies of two libraries, to summarize the developmental trajectory of library innovative services. **[Result/Conclusion]** The paper proposes implications and suggestions for Chinese university libraries from the perspectives of strategic service planning, novel teaching activities, user feedback evaluation, institutional collaboration, and staff professional development.

Classification Number: G252

Keywords: ACRL Excellence in Academic Libraries Award; library innovative services; implications and suggestions

DOI: 10.13266/j.issn.0252-3116.2018.17.017

With the evolution of society and continuous advancement of information technology, libraries face challenges from social changes in the services they provide to users. Innovation remains a timeless topic for libraries in service delivery and a critical issue that every librarian and researcher must confront. To encourage libraries to continuously develop “interesting” and “meaningful” services, numerous awards have been established globally for library services, such as the “Library of the Year” award and “Best Small Library Award” by *Library Journal* and Gale Group in the United States, which aim to encourage distinctive services and raise public awareness of libraries, and the IFLA International Marketing Award, which promotes global library marketing practices and innovative activities. Domestically, the Guangdong Library Society’s “Outstanding Service Award” primarily recognizes librarians who diligently develop collections, reform technical methods, and enthusiastically serve readers in their daily work.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) is a higher education association of librarians dedicated to advancing learning by developing programs, products, and services that help academic and research librarians learn, innovate, and lead within academia. ACRL has established numerous awards to recognize outstanding libraries worldwide annually, facilitating knowledge sharing and experience exchange. Among these, the Excellence in Academic Libraries Award (hereinafter referred to as the “Excellence Award”) was established in 2000 and has a history of 17 years.

Chinese university libraries still have considerable room for development in diversifying service methods, enriching service content, and systematizing service models. As society develops and technology evolves, libraries must continuously launch innovative services to attract users and promote their brand. Domestic

attention to the ACRL Excellence Award has been limited, with insufficient in-depth research and sparse literature. The award's development history well illustrates the evolution and trends of library innovative services. Therefore, this study employs web-based and literature research methods to conduct an in-depth analysis of award-winning libraries, summarize their service characteristics, and provide referenceable insights for Chinese university libraries.

1 Overview of ACRL Excellence Award Winners

The Excellence Award aims to recognize academic library staff who work as teams to advance their institution's educational mission. Each year, three libraries are selected from applicants and categorized by institution type: community colleges, colleges, and university libraries. The award has specific evaluation criteria: libraries must demonstrate how staff collaborate in library development and promoting institutional educational missions. The award emphasizes “outcomes” rather than “inputs,” focusing on innovative requirements, exemplary projects, and productive relationships between faculty and students. Sponsored by the GOBI Library Solutions Committee of EBSCO, the award provides a \$3,000 prize to winning libraries annually. This study summarizes the 53 award-winning libraries from 2000-2017, as shown in .

2 Innovative Service Characteristics of Award-Winning Libraries

As society develops, library services continue to evolve, though many classic service programs remain unchanged longitudinally. Among all award-winning libraries, terms like “innovative services,” “exemplary projects,” and “collaborative relationships” frequently appear—these are creeds that libraries tirelessly uphold. Through investigation and analysis of the 53 award-winning libraries on the ACRL website, this study summarizes the following service characteristics.

2.1 Expanding Physical Space

Every library attempts to expand, fully utilize, and renovate its physical space to create a comfortable and spacious environment for users. The 2014 award-winning Robert E. Kennedy Library created a 24-hour main floor, seminar rooms, and multimedia classrooms for students, along with two independent study rooms and group study areas for graduate students. The 2013 award-winning Villanova University Library created a 24-hour café. The 2002 award-winning Cornell University Library established a Distributed Learning Office to coordinate library services systematically, achieving seamless support. Many university libraries extend operating hours during final exam periods, even offering 24-hour access, while building specialized multimedia classrooms, maker spaces, and seminar rooms for professional learning and academic exchange. These measures prove highly effective and significant, allowing students to fully

utilize the library in various aspects and tangibly experience the services and changes provided.

2.2 Novel Teaching Activities

Regarding academic education, most libraries provide information literacy services and propose methods to improve students' information literacy skills. The 2006 award-winning Augustana College Library had a team of librarian-instructors jointly develop teaching strategies to integrate information literacy skills into the curriculum. Some libraries offer information literacy courses and lectures—the 2014 award-winning Lafayette College Library had librarians teach first-year students information literacy skills, including information retrieval, acquisition, integration, and evaluation methods.

Since 2000, most libraries have emphasized online teaching and innovative pedagogical methods. Education is no longer solely the prerogative of universities; libraries also attach great importance to this area. The 2012 award-winning Seattle Central Community College Library has offered over eight courses in the past 12 years, currently offering six courses per semester including online courses, consultation courses, and information literacy courses. The 2015 award-winning Lawrence W. Tyree Library at Santa Fe College proposed the application of flipped classrooms, where librarians collaborated with faculty to adopt flipped classroom teaching methods, giving students more self-directed research time and making classroom teaching more efficient. Students generally responded positively, reporting that this teaching model made their professional learning more efficient and focused.

2.3 Enriching Creative Activities

In reading promotion, to enhance students' reading interest, Illinois Central College Library held its first summer reading program open to all in 2012, offering visit coupons to users who could read four books within a designated time. In 2014, the library also hosted "Library Night." The 2012 award-winning Seattle Central Community College Library collaborated with Seattle Public Library to hold the annual "Seattle Reads" program. Reading promotion activities at various university libraries received strong support and participation from students, many of whom re-examined reading and put it into practice.

In creative projects, the 2011 Grinnell College Libraries provided stress-relief programs for students during final exam week, allowing them to graffiti and draw on library display boards. The same year, Santa Barbara City College's Luria Library organized poetry listening and recitation activities during exam week. In 2015, Purdue University Libraries prepared end-of-semester activities including free refreshments and board games to help students release stress. Additionally, in 2013, Walla Walla Community College Library held competitions and bicycle riding activities to enrich students' extracurricular lives.

Creative activities undoubtedly attract students. To capture attention, libraries

must continuously launch innovative services and creative activities. This also represents a marketing strategy for university libraries—the “interesting over meaningful” approach—where libraries can plan “interesting” activities to attract more users, then transform them into “meaningful” services to convert potential users into long-term loyal patrons.

2.4 Establishing Collaborative Relationships

2.4.1 Collaboration Between Librarians and Faculty Librarians collaborate with faculty to offer courses taught both in classrooms and libraries, adjusting curricula and creating online classroom guidance. Many libraries assign library liaisons for this purpose. The 2015 award-winning Lawrence W. Tyree Library at Santa Fe College established liaison positions where each librarian is responsible for contacting a faculty member, tracking student learning progress to better understand developments and provide improved teaching solutions.

2.4.2 Collaboration Between Libraries and Student Organizations University libraries cannot exist independently without students, nor can students afford to lose trust in their libraries. To provide good services, libraries must maintain close contact with students to understand their needs promptly. The 2015 award-winning Purdue University Libraries worked closely with a student advisory committee to timely understand student perspectives and suggestions about the library. This timely feedback from student organizations ensures continuously improving service quality that meets student needs.

2.4.3 Collaboration Between Libraries and Campus Departments Libraries collaborate with various campus departments to conduct activities that provide better services for students. In 2015, Amherst College Library collaborated with the archives department on ancient book digitization and project processing, and with the writing center to assign tasks using professional writing guidance. The library also partnered with educational programs to develop projects designed for early childhood education science degree students.

2.4.4 Collaboration Between Libraries and External Institutions Some academic libraries collaborate with other universities. In 2002, Cornell University Library organized a joint Northeast Regional Library (NERL) alliance with other colleges to jointly evaluate and negotiate electronic resource subscriptions. Additionally, libraries collaborate with academic institutions. The 2010 award-winning Indiana University Bloomington Library partnered with software developer Boopsie and university IT service companies in 2009 to launch mobile services for universities.

Through analysis of award-winning content, we can observe development trends and changing characteristics of library services. In the early 2000s, libraries focused on building digital libraries and designing library homepages. Around 2003, most innovations involved establishing electronic resources and databases,

which have now become essential library components. Between 2000-2007, all award applications focused on three requirements: innovative requirements meeting academic needs; leadership in developing exemplary projects for other libraries to follow; and productive relationships with faculty and students. After 2007, service content became increasingly rich, with forms extending beyond these three aspects. However, the applications of 53 libraries mainly encompassed three dimensions: innovation, leadership, and relationships. More new technologies have been applied in libraries, such as using Google Maps to create atlases, while collaborations with software developers and technology companies have gradually increased. Many libraries have also begun implementing and developing institutional repositories. After 2010, library services became increasingly diversified, offering students more than single-mode services, including more cultural and recreational activities that significantly contributed to students' extracurricular lives. At the current stage, library services are more targeted and extensive, truly opening their doors wide.

3 Case Studies of Innovative Services at Award-Winning Libraries

The 2015 award winners—the Lawrence W. Tyree Library at Santa Fe College in the community college category and Purdue University Libraries in the university category—offer diverse service types, rich practical experience, and many exemplary projects for other libraries to emulate. This study selects these two cases for in-depth analysis to better understand the innovative services provided.

3.1 Lawrence W. Tyree Library, Santa Fe College

Santa Fe College is a public college in Gainesville, Florida, and a member of the Florida College System, founded in 1966. The Lawrence W. Tyree Library (hereinafter “Tyree Library”) is an integral part of Santa Fe College, located on the Northwest Campus. The library’s mission is to serve all students and faculty at Santa Fe College. The college’s application demonstrated its library’s excellence through three aspects.

3.1.1 Creativity and Innovation Tyree Library uses creative and innovative activities and services to meet academic needs, including: Novel information literacy instruction. The library held 255 library instruction sessions over two years, with one-quarter of enrolled students attending. Virtual instruction. Librarians began providing online instruction through the Canvas learning management system in fall 2014, which proved helpful for students’ research projects. Assessment results. To ensure instruction sessions meet student needs and improve their information literacy skills, the library evaluates each session after fall and spring semesters, compiling student feedback. [Figure 1: see original paper] shows that students became increasingly confident in using library resources after information literacy training.

3.1.2 Exemplary Projects Tyree Library develops and implements exemplary projects that other libraries can emulate. To welcome new students annually, the library hosts Library Mystery Night, a library treasure hunt game for three-person teams that uses clues and entire library resources to find designated topics. This puzzle game attracts many students and fully demonstrates the library's charm. Additionally, since 2011, the library has collaborated with Santa Fe College's Undergraduate Education Working Group's research institution to hold an annual Library Research Award, which recognizes students' exemplary research and information literacy skills, effectively enhancing their professional competence.

3.1.3 Faculty-Student Connections Librarians establish solid and stable relationships with faculty and students. The library assigns liaisons to 30 different academic departments and program areas to collect college-specific needs. Rich teaching and curricular activities attract many students while effectively improving their information literacy capabilities. It is precisely because librarians bring creativity and innovation to the community and their excellent educational programs that they won the 2015 community college category Excellence Award.

3.2 Purdue University Libraries

Purdue University is a state university system with six campuses; the main campus is in West Lafayette, Indiana, and is one of the world's top engineering schools. Purdue University Libraries has proposed numerous excellent initiatives and serves as an important leader in advancing the university's core strengths and global mission, demonstrating excellence in the following aspects.

3.2.1 Teaching Activities Information literacy education is an indispensable part of the library. Purdue University Libraries is committed to helping graduates find needed information and complete career planning, launching a comprehensive information literacy program over the past decade that continues to expand. Library faculty establish teaching partnerships with course instructors, embedding not through single sessions or one-time workshops but throughout campus curricula. Specifically, library faculty participated in redesigning undergraduate biology core courses to help improve students' information literacy skills and stimulate their interest in exploring biology.

3.2.2 Creative Services During final exam periods, the library partners with Therapy Dogs International to bring therapy dogs for student interaction, helping relieve academic stress. The library also holds a student video contest titled "Why I Love Purdue Libraries" during extracurricular periods, which increases student attention to the library, enhances the library's status among students, and promotes the library's excellent brand, as shown in [Figure 2: see original paper].

3.2.3 Data Management A key focus area for Purdue University Libraries is data research. Data is an increasingly important issue in academic communication, and data management represents a significant and growing challenge for research universities. The Purdue University Research Repository (PURR) is the core of Purdue's data services and one of the world's leading institutional repositories. PURR provides online collaborative workspaces and data sharing platforms to support data management needs for Purdue researchers and their collaborators, allowing researchers to conduct research and publish datasets online. Beyond PURR, the library regularly consults with faculty and research labs to help evaluate their data.

It is Purdue University Libraries' spirit of excellence, responsible service attitude, and high-quality service standards that earned them the 2015 university library Excellence Award honor.

4 Implications and Suggestions for Chinese University Libraries from the Excellence Award

4.1 Service Strategic Planning

When providing various services, libraries typically develop service plans and strategic planning to ensure systematic and effective service delivery. Many award-winning libraries begin by stating their vision and mission, with numerous libraries planning activities along a strategic line from vision goals →innovative implementation →activity results →user feedback evaluation. During implementation, libraries utilize various marketing methods and tools to promote activities. As shown in [Figure 3: see original paper], California State Polytechnic University Robert E. Kennedy Library outlined its service strategic planning map before launching service content, helping both library staff clarify service priorities and users understand main service content. This entire process belongs to the service strategic system, demonstrating the systematic and comprehensive nature of library services. Strategic planning serves as a compass for libraries, ensuring service accuracy and targeting to effectively provide precise service activities. For domestic university libraries, most service strategic planning is relatively singular and incomplete. Learning from foreign libraries' processes for providing services and holding activities, with emphasis on systematic service delivery, will greatly improve service quality and efficiency.

4.2 Novel Teaching Activities

Foreign libraries attach great importance to students' academic education. Many Chinese universities have begun designing innovative activities, such as the University of Science and Technology of China Library's graduate student information literacy summer camp aimed at improving information literacy skills, and Beijing Jiaotong University Library's "Scholarly Fragrance Cup" reading series. Many Chinese university libraries have series of special lectures, and some arrange orientation sessions for first-year students on library use and

reading promotion. While Chinese university libraries' activities are continuously upgrading and innovating, overall there remains considerable room for improvement. The connection between course instructors and librarians is not close enough, making efficient collaboration difficult. Compared with domestic library instruction, most award-winning library staff collaborate with faculty to offer courses that are not only rich in content but also highly educational. For example, the 2015 award-winning Tyree Library held 255 library instruction sessions from January to October 2014, collaborating with faculty to adjust curricula and create online classroom guidance. Therefore, drawing on successful foreign cases, Chinese libraries could offer more library courses including online courses or applications integrated with student curricula.

4.3 User Feedback Evaluation

Most award-winning libraries include assessment in their applications. Some libraries describe evaluation feedback after each activity or project, while others directly present original evaluations from faculty and students. Regardless of method, the purpose is to explore whether library activities benefit users and are meaningful and valuable. Award-winning libraries approach each activity from vision, mission, problems, actions, and evaluation perspectives, focusing on both process and outcomes to avoid wasted effort. Chinese university libraries still lack in user feedback and could learn from award-winning libraries' activity processes to serve users more efficiently while timely understanding user perspectives and suggestions, thereby narrowing the distance with users.

4.4 Institutional Collaboration

Through 17 years of analysis of award-winning libraries, it is evident that they collaborate with various industries and institutions. Libraries can cooperate not only with faculty and students but also with external academic institutions or university alliances to better improve service quality and expand service scope. Whether university or public libraries, they are not independent entities. Libraries are both service providers and active collaborators—only through collaboration can mutual benefits be maximized and the most comprehensive services provided to users.

4.5 Staff Professional Development

Award-winning libraries focus not only on student development but also on library staff development. People are the key to service, and staff training is crucial. Library staff are primarily service providers and collaborators; improving service quality must begin with improving staff quality. Therefore, librarians must possess certain information literacy and professional skills to assume corresponding responsibilities. For example, the 2007 award-winning Trinity University Library encouraged staff to attend workshops and conferences on campus or locally related to their work. The 2002 award-winning Cornell University Library encouraged its librarians to give presentations, and its librarians

were elected as members of the National Archives. Libraries can offer training courses and lectures for faculty and staff, holding regular meetings to discuss and understand each employee's work status and needs.

Analysis of award-winning libraries reveals that library service roles have evolved from collection-centered → librarian-centered → user-centered. Today, libraries increasingly focus on interactive communication, developing and growing together with users. Service models have gradually shifted from provision models to participation models, which better broaden library perspectives and expand service projects. In recent years, domestic library innovative services have continuously increased, and the library's image in users' minds has gradually deepened. Drawing on foreign award-winning libraries' service content, Chinese university libraries should develop service content suitable for their users based on national conditions and their own characteristics, making libraries treasure troves of unlimited information and pinnacles of knowledge and human achievement.

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