

Long-Range Planning: An Interim Report on the Duke Experience*

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Nearly everyone today is in favor of planning. Indeed, today's libraries are the result of planning. More importantly, tomorrow's libraries are going to be the result of the planning and decisions made today.

What then is planning? Le Breton and Henning (1961) defined a plan as a *pre-determined course of action*. Further, their plan as described had three characteristics: first, planning involved the future; second, planning involved action; and third, planning was the result of personal or organizational causation. In other words, the future course of action had to be taken by the planner or someone designated by or for him within the organization. Planning has also been described as an attitude or way of thinking; a process or flow of events moving toward some goal; and a structure, with many components including a plan for the entire organization as well as plans for specific operations within the organization.

To develop the idea of planning in a different vein, Robert Kemper in discussing Library Planning (1970) stated four things which librarians generally assume planning to be, but which emphatically it is not. First, a library standard, although beneficial and needed, is not a library plan. Standards instead can be discriminately applied to library planning and should be used as a beginning point, but

nothing more. Second, forecasting is not planning because the planner takes no future action. Forecasting at best attempts to predict what action other people will take and what future conditions will exist. Since forecasts are really assumptions, planning is necessary precisely because we cannot forecast. Lest I be misunderstood, however, forecasting does play a role in planning. Harvard University Library, for example, recently summarized the findings of a planning study submitted to its President in May 1966. The authors of the planning study attempted to look ahead for approximately a decade, so it is now becoming possible to check the accuracy of their projections. The quantitative forecasts were based upon the experience of the preceding decade, with such adjustments as seemed to be reasonable; and they are probably as close to the mark as their authors expected. Their prediction of the number of volumes was high by only five per cent. Thus, forecasting is an integral part of the planning process, yet different from planning itself.

The third misconception is that planning deals with future decisions. Peter Drucker in 1959 concluded that decisions exist only in the present. The question facing the long-range planner is not what we should do tomorrow, rather what we must do today to be ready for an uncertain tomorrow. Finally, planning is not a bound document resulting from annual or regularly scheduled planning sessions.

*An address presented at the NCLA Biennial Conference in Winston-Salem on October 7, 1977.

Planning is a dynamic process which necessitates evaluation of results against expectations. When the term "long-range" is added to planning, it simply means grappling systematically with future opportunities, problems, and alternative courses of action.

What does planning accomplish? It gives direction to growth and complexity, it minimizes *ad hoc* decisions which usually narrow tomorrow's choices, it provides a basic framework for local service, and it opens communication channels. Regardless of the grand manner in which library planning is undertaken, it is doomed to failure unless it has the solid support, participation, and guidance of top library administration; unless it reflects the needs of the institution it serves; unless it delegates responsibilities for action; and unless it provides criteria to measure output.

The Duke experience began last January when the University Librarian, having made a commitment to library planning, sent letters to twelve members of the library staff at all levels, inviting them to be members of the Perkins Library Long-Range Planning Committee. The committee was to be charged with setting goals and priorities for future operations and organization of the Perkins system. Stated in the communication was the expectation that the planning study would have a major impact on the future direction of the library. Although the letter clearly indicated that the demands on time and energy would be great, the entire group accepted the challenge to make an important contribution to the library and to Duke.

Soon thereafter the University Librarian presented a formal charge to the members of the committee. Included in the charge were the following directives:

1. Establish long-range goals and intermediate and short-term objectives.
2. Translate idealistic goals and objectives into realistic ones

3. Determine priorities
4. Evaluate the degree to which the library is currently meeting the goals and objectives
5. Recommend program changes to permit achievement of goals
6. Recommend organizational and staff patterns necessary to achieve goals.

When the committee convened for the first meeting, the chairman delivered a threefold exhortation, "Leave behind vested interest, for we are here as representatives of the entire library and must plan with the best interests of the entire library always in mind; regard each other as equals, for even though we have different jobs in the library and come from different levels of the staff, each of us has a voice and contribution; involve the staff in the task ahead." The group agreed that self-education was a first priority. We thus searched the literature for information on planning, set up a reserve, and studied carefully similar efforts at Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, the Library of Congress, and Michigan.

Our instructions had included the stipulation that the report would contain two parts: idealistic or blue sky goals and realistic goals which could be done now, each to be presented with cost estimates. We thus began to ask many pertinent questions. Are we doing the most important things? How can we achieve the ideal if the budget level remains the same? What services or operations can be dropped or changed? For you see we were told from the beginning that solutions could not be more money. What a task!

The group soon became conscious that much information was already at our fingertips. The entire University had engaged itself in a planning effort in 1972. Further documents were generated in 1976 when each department on campus undertook a self-study as a part of re-accreditation. The library itself had on file annual reports as well as data obtained in indi-

vidual committee reports addressing specific problems. The results of two user questionnaires concerning library services were also available.

Having saturated ourselves with reading materials, we began to discuss possible methodology or how to plan the plan. There was general agreement that we should define *what we are*, in terms of mission and guiding principles; moving on to *where we are*, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, problems, environmental factors; *where we should be*, goals and objectives; *how far along the way we already are*, evaluation; *how we get where we really want to be* or recommendations for action. To assist us in answering these questions, we quickly realized that we needed to involve the entire university community.

Thus we began with a questionnaire to all members of the Perkins Library staff, requesting that they address their thinking to what the library should be doing, where it should be going, and what particular problems needed attention, this latter area to include changes and solutions if desired. General areas of current library concern were to be kept in mind as the responses were formulated: services, collections, staffing, physical facilities, organization, current or potential patrons, and cooperative efforts. The purpose of the survey was to assist the committee in deciding on the various areas of study and planning to be pursued and the priority to be attached to each.

As this input was being sought, the committee began drafting its mission statement, guiding principles, and general objectives. In each case, as in drawing up later questionnaires, letters, or similar documents, two or three members of the committee were given the responsibility of providing the rough draft to be discussed and finally agreed upon by the entire group. I commend to you this method of work: it has proven most satisfactory for us.

We next developed a questionnaire which was circulated to each of the twenty-eight academic departments at Duke, asking that they not only rank collections and services in terms of value, but that they also indicate their own research and departmental needs. The survey sought further to acquaint members of the faculty with the problems as well as the tremendous changes looming ahead in the library world so that they would be more keenly aware of the difficult decisions confronting librarians. To date we have received twenty-six departmental responses, along with several individual responses, an excellent ratio, we think. Since we included in the questionnaire catastrophic changes like the possible closing of the card catalog, we offered to meet with representatives of each department to provide additional information and to answer questions. Teams of two staff members from the library ultimately conferred with sixteen of the departments, one of the most worthwhile exchanges we have undertaken.

An adaptation of the faculty questionnaire went to the members of the student legislature at Duke and to a select group of library student assistants. All of these returns, together with already available documents, were used as raw data to further the planning process.

The next step of the committee was to identify eleven areas of concern for intensive, in depth study. The areas selected are as follows: organization and staffing, collection development, preservation and security, personnel and staff development, services (control and circulation), services (informational and instructional), processing, administrative support, communications, public relations, and budget, each area with many sub-divisions. A letter was then distributed to all members of the Perkins Library staff, asking that those desiring to serve on one of the task forces indicate preferences reflecting their area of keenest interest. The response was very

gratifying. Everyone who volunteered was assigned. In choosing participants, the committee took into consideration individual choices and committee balance. The majority were placed in some areas of high interest. Sixty-five staff members were ultimately given specific task force assignments; two others accepted special assignments.

A general orientation meeting was held at which time additional aid was warmly welcomed. Although the participants were told that this particular job must receive some priority, they were reminded that the work of the library must go on. Support staff were cautioned about working beyond the forty-hour work week; professional staff had no such limitations beyond the fact that there are only twenty-four hours in a day! In the interest of time and efficiency, members of the initial Long-Range Planning Committee are directing each of the task forces. We are now engaged in a four months' study to be concluded with reports due by the end of October. These reports will form the basis for the final report and recommendations to the University Librarian.

Throughout the planning process we have sought to present information to our constituents. Minutes of all the Long-Range Planning Committee sessions have been distributed to the staff; reports have been delivered to councils, assemblies, and general staff meetings; articles have been written for newsletters to faculty and staff. Plans include continued efforts to keep faculty, administration, students, and staff up-to-date.

The committee has also sought to receive information from its constituents. We recently invited the chancellor to confer with the Long-Range Planning Committee so that he might express his views concerning the future direction of the University. Because of the session, we are now more aware of the changes and the limitations and can hopefully respond accordingly. As the final report is being prepared, we shall take great pains to gain the approval

of all groups, both internal and external. To insure implementation of the plan, we shall probably suggest an ongoing planning committee to assign responsibilities and measure results.

You might say the end is in sight. How do we assess the planning effort thus far? I would not be honest or fair if I told you there have been no problems. Some of the participants have said the task is impossible, for no group can cover so wide a range of topics in such a short time. Too much is expected! The effort is bound therefore to be superficial. Then there are a few who wonder if anything is going to happen as a result of the recommendations. A few probably really believe nothing will change.

There have been some misunderstandings in spite of what we thought was good communication. When the first draft of a proposed innovative and different organization chart circulated for discussion purposes, the grapevine quickly sprang into action and many were convinced that this design was the wave of the future at Duke. Other troublesome questions have arisen from time to time. Why should my group bother with this particular assignment? Is it not true that the decisions have already been made? And in some cases, the answer appeared to be in the affirmative. There was one week when a particular task force decided to launch out into some new areas, only to discover after doing some of the work that a committee was already addressing the problem or that a paper had already been written on the subject. Not all of the problems have been large, however, and some have provided amusement for all. For example, when the eleven special concerns circulated to the staff, included in the subdivisions were two rather unusual items called "date banks" and "date processing." Several librarians inquired immediately about this marvelous new service, expressing interest in working in both areas.

It is true that all of us on occasion have been overwhelmed with the magnitude of our task. Writing a mission statement, designing a questionnaire, or tackling a particularly sensitive problem can be agonizing, emotional, and sobering. Yet when we think of the opportunity of planning the direction of the library, we find ourselves being stimulated and challenged. There is so much good about the planning effort thus far that I find it easy to be optimistic. In my eighteen years at Duke, I have never seen the staff work so hard and conscientiously to insure a quality report. The day to day work is still being done. Librarians are becoming involved and interested in the total library picture. Horizons are being broadened. Growth is apparent. As one said, "The spirit of working together for a common goal in itself make the whole effort worth it." The words of another staff member are further indi-

cation that the staff finds the experience satisfying, "The long-range task forces are the first opportunity many people have had to participate in a library activity that is larger than their immediate job requirements — all previous library committees have been appointed. Task force members, especially those for whom looking at the library as a whole is a new experience, are finding this personally stimulating and rewarding, as well as valuable for the library. Several people have mentioned the hope that after the Long-Range Planning Committee completes its report there will still be some ongoing forum for staff members to contribute to the planning process."

Perhaps a fitting way to close these remarks is to invite you to try the world of long-range planning. I can guarantee that anyone who participates in such an endeavor will never be the same!

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