EDITORIAL
The new mission of a new i-school

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Abstract

Purpose – To discuss the mission statement for the Institute of Library and Information Sciences at Humboldt University in Berlin.

Design/methodology/approach – The article examines other i-school mission statements to find the key common elements.

Findings – Connections between people, technology, and information represent common themes of i-school missions.

Originality/value – The Institute's mission statement is still being discussed. This analysis offers one viewpoint for the final conception.

Keywords Mission statements, Information science, Universities, Germany

Paper type Viewpoint

The i-school project includes the leading US "information schools" and represents their commitment to the "relationship between technology, information, and people". The Charter goes on to say:

> This is characterized by a commitment to learning and understanding of the role of information in human endeavors. The I-Schools take it as given that expertise in all forms of information is required for progress in science, business, education, and culture. This expertise must include understanding of the uses and users of information, as well as information technologies and their applications (iSchool Project, 2006).

The implicit balance in the language matters. i-schools are not lightweight computer science programs. They are an explicit reformulation of the traditional library interest in tools that help make information available and in the information consumption habits and expectations of their users. One of the key technology tools of a century ago was the card catalog. It helped libraries manage collections of a size and complexity that outstripped human memory and the simple sequential entries in a book-style catalog. Likewise the users of a century ago were a smaller group with more specific disciplinary interests and expected only text-based works from a library collection. Times change and missions must too.

An institute reborn

Since October 2006 I have had the delightful opportunity of serving as a professor in and the director of the Institute for Library and Information Science at Humboldt University in Berlin (Institut für Bibliotheks- und Informationswissenschaft or IBI).

The IBI is a new creation from a far more traditional library program. Humboldt University provided the original model for the modern research university in the early nineteenth century and continues to follow that ideal today. The IBI's precursor already had notable research in the area of public libraries through the work of Konrad Umlauf. When the University reestablished its library school program, it added significant new research strength in the person of Peter Schirmbacher, who serves also as the university's chief information officer, and it began an international search for a new professor and director with both administrative and research experience. My appointment also came with the promise of more faculty lines and research assistants.

Finding the right people is necessary, but the goals that set the Institute's mission and direction are even more important. The students recognize this and have been asking for them. While goals need to grow out of a common discourse that includes both students and faculty, my job as director is to provide a starting point, which I am doing in this editorial. *Library Hi Tech* seems appropriate as a starting point because of IBI's uniquely important role. It is the only library school at a research university in Germany and the only German institution with the right to give a doctorate in library and information science. What happens here matters well beyond the boundaries of Berlin.

Other missions

The mission statements from other i-schools offer plausible models for the IBI. Here are several, in order from the shortest to the longest:

University of Washington, Information School:

Connecting people, information, and technology (www.ischool.washington.edu/).

University of Syracuse, School of Information Studies:

To expand human capabilities through information (istweb.syr.edu/about/mission.asp).

University of Michigan, School of Information:

Connecting people, information, and technology in more valuable ways (www.si.umich.edu/).

University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science:

The mission of the School is to provide:

- Graduate education for leaders in research and practice in the fields of library and information science;
- Groundbreaking research to advance preservation of and access to information in both traditional and digital libraries and in the many settings outside of libraries where large amounts of critical information are collected;
- Useful service to librarians and other information service providers, as well as to the citizens of Illinois (www.lis.uiuc.edu/about/overview/).

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, School of Information and Library Science:

We are here to conduct inquiry devoted to information generation and use to prepare reflective, adaptive information professionals for action in the present and the future, and to transfer to them an uncompromising advocacy for knowledge. . .

The School of Information and Library Science seeks to advance the profession and practice of librarianship and information science; to prepare students for careers in the field of

information and library science; and to make significant contributions to the study of information. Faculty members further these goals by teaching and advisory work; by research and scholarly publishing; and by service to the school, the university, the state, and the professional community (http://sils.unc.edu/about/).

University of Pittsburgh, School of Information Sciences:

> The SIS faculty, staff, students, and programs – uniquely interdisciplinary, multicultural, and international by design – are dedicated to the building of a global society and an informed citizenship based upon the foundation of knowledge made possible only through access to reliable and useful information.
>
> SIS will pursue excellence in teaching, research, and service to ensure that the information needs of society can be met because access to information enhances the quality of life for all people and organizations. SIS will educate high quality information professionals and build the knowledge of our discipline. SIS will also develop resources and tools to create, organize, find, transmit, preserve, integrate, and use information (www2.sis.pitt.edu/aboutSIS/missions.html).

Length is an important issue to decide for a mission statement. A very short statement, like those of Washington, Syracuse, and Michigan have impact and can easily be included in visible locations like the home page, but their shortness limits them to a few keyword concepts without further explanation. The longer statements like North Carolina and Pittsburgh tell more about the programs and their intent. Illinois has a compromise structure with three brief mission statements for teaching, research, and service. It is interesting that none of these statements mention social science or other research methods, even though teaching research methods plays a role in all of their curriculums.

Comparable mission statements are hard to find for German library schools. The descriptions of many school's goals tend to be more focused on curriculum. The Fachbereich Informationswissenschaft (School of Information Science) at the Fachhochschule ("University of Applied Sciences") in Potsdam is a good example:

> Sie möchten Informationsexperte werden und suchen ein Studium, das Sie optimal auf die zukünftigen beruflichen Anforderungen vorbereitet?
>
> Wir, der Fachbereich Informationswissenschaften der Fachhochschule Potsdam, bieten Ihnen ein deutschlandweit einmaliges Studienkonzept: Allen Studierenden des Fachbereichs werden die Grundlagen der drei Studiengänge Archiv, Bibliothek und Dokumentation vermittelt. Damit erhalten Sie bei uns eine einzigartig breite fachliche Basis.
>
> [Do you want to become an information expert and find a course of study that optimally prepares you for future professional requirements?
>
> We, the School of Information at the University of Applied Sciences in Potsdam, offer you a program unique in Germany: all students in the program learn the basics in the three disciplines of archives, libraries, and documentation. That way you get from us a distinctively broad professional basis.] (my translation) (http://informationswissenschaften.fh-potsdam.de/fb5info.html).

A less curriculum-oriented example comes from the University of Constance (Universität Konstanz) School of Computing and Information Science (Fachbereichs Informatik und Informationswissenschafts):

> Das Leitbild der Konstanzer Informationswissenschaft bezieht sich auf den pragmatischen Primat bei der Sicht auf Information: Information ist handlungsrelevantes Wissen oder – formelartig – Information ist Wissen in Aktion. Die (sozialen, kognitiven, politischen,

ökonomischen, ethischen und kulturellen) Rahmenbedingungen der Nutzung und die Handlungsrelevanz von Information ergänzen die ansonsten häufig dominierende technische Sicht auf Information (www.inf-wiss.uni-konstanz.de/).

At Konstanz Information Science the concept of "the pragmatic primacy" of information has been coined: Information is knowledge relevant for action, or to put it in a formula - information is knowledge in action. The regard of social, cognitive, political, economic, ethical and cultural implications of information complements the often predominating technical approach to information … (www.inf-wiss.uni-konstanz.de/start_e.html).

The balance between culturally important aspects of information and the purely technical elements of access, which can dominate both traditional and digital library studies, is particularly worth noting.

As with Constance, an important requirement of the IBI's mission statement is that it sounds good in both German (the chief language of teaching) and English (for international use).

The best compromise in mission statement styles might be a brief statement with a separate longer explanation about teaching and research.

Building the mission statement

Humboldt University has a long mission statement that covers 14 points:

(1) humanity and scholarship;

(2) ongoing reform in the direction of excellence;

(3) social responsibility and cultural presence;

(4) the unity of research and teaching;

(5) scholarly obligations;

(6) innovation in study and teaching;

(7) research as the lifeblood of the university;

(8) enabling new growth;

(9) equal opportunity;

(10) resources, endowments, and graduates;

(11) self-administration;

(12) internationalism;

(13) a university open to the world; and

(14) Berlin – a city of scholarship (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, 2002).

A mission statement for the IBI should reflect some elements of the mission of the university as a whole, particularly the emphasis on excellence in research, teaching and scholarship. It should also reflect the core principles of other i-schools: technology, information, and people.

There is one other important element that I think belongs in the mission statement of an institution like the IBI: a culture of inquiry and analysis. That was very much a part of the vision of the brothers Humboldt. They were curious men who wanted to explore and understand the world. That urge to know more has never entirely left the traditions of the university despite the traumas of its twentieth century past.

Nonetheless it needs to be cultivated and reinvigorated in each new generation. The IBI is particularly fortune in its students. They share that spirit already.

Most i-school mission statements do not mention libraries *per se*. That may be in part because they are trying to distinguish themselves from more traditional library science. Nonetheless the IBI made a conscious choice to retain the word library ("Bibliothek") in its name, and the mission statement ought to reflect that corporate decision.

One possible version of an IBI mission statement might combine that cultural commitment with the most repeated points of the Humboldt mission statement and with that of the University Washington:

> Excellence in scholarship, research and teaching through a culture of inquiry and analysis that mediates the connections between libraries, information, technology and people.

The separate longer statement explaining the IBI's goals could cover topics such as its commitment:

- To bring scholarship about the latest information technology and technology trends into the classroom.
- To provide students with a basis for work in both the digital and traditional aspects of contemporary library work.
- To prepare students to take information management positions within companies.
- To ensure that students have an understanding of social science methods that allows them to understand and contribute to research.
- To engage internationally at both the teaching and research levels.
- To build a research and teaching program that creates a distinctive Humboldt perspective and practical set of tools for addressing the changing needs of the world of information.

The IBI has great potential and deserves a mission that expresses its future plans. No one person can write those goals. They need to be an organic part of the institution's own culture and self-vision. There are merely my contributions. It will be interesting to see what the final result is like.

References

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