

## Expect More

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In the 2014 Ithaka S & R briefing paper on [“Leveraging the Liaison Model,”](#) Anne Kenney, the University Librarian at Cornell University, discusses what is needed from academic libraries today. She notes, “In an age where some members of the academic community question the value and expense of a library or maintain antiquated notions of what a library does, it is our challenge to make them expect more and to deliver the expertise, services, and resources that will be differentiators in their academic lives. We should seek less to answer the question of how to build 21st century research libraries and direct more of our energies towards thinking about what kind of universities will succeed in the 21st century.”

The main point behind this for me is that universities are changing. As much as some people have been questioning the value of libraries for some time, they are now questioning the need for universities in a way that has not been seen before. Public universities are especially under the gun, needing to be highly accountable to state legislatures and to the general public. We in the academy have a critical need to explain what we do and why it’s important. We are perceived by many as residing in a privileged ivory tower. The value of research can be an especially tough sell to the public. Tenure is often misunderstood and unpopular and academic freedom is poorly understood.

There is a growing sense that universities must provide a good return on the investment (ROI) made in them. There is concern over student debt, retention of students, graduation rates and years to completion, and for students to find meaningful employment following graduation. Governors, legislatures, the Department of Education, and accrediting bodies are weighing in on curriculum and what will provide good ROI in higher education. Many states are setting general education standards because they believe they are more in tune with what the state and the students need from higher education than we in the academy are. Universities are not always viewed as being good stewards of public monies.

The point of view espoused by Anne Kenney and others is one I share and that I believe the Poynter Library faculty and staff embody. I believe that we in the Library must expect more of ourselves and of our role in the University, and the faculty and administration must also expect more of what we can and should do. Not in the sense of just taking on more and more but in the sense of thinking of the library as an active partner, fully engaged in the success of the university in all its endeavors. We are partners in supporting the entire research cycle, in assisting other faculty in preparing students to be successful lifelong learners, in utilizing technology effectively to transform the academy, in building bridges between disciplines and across traditional divides, in being models of inclusion and diversity. Libraries should play an active role in recruiting students and then working with other campus partners to ensure that their experience is so rewarding and successful that they complete their degrees and go on to find meaningful lives and careers after graduation. We must be actively engaged with the community beyond the campus, playing a key role in strengthening and building a wide range of partnerships. We have expertise and skills that go far beyond what many think a library can – or should – be.

The role of an academic library in the modern university is complex and evolving. We are the [Gateway to the World’s Information](#), not only providing access to rich collections of primary and secondary resources but also in helping our students and faculty navigate the increasingly complex world of scholarly communication. [We provide new, technology-rich spaces for collaboration.](#) We support the entire research cycle. We are interdisciplinary experts, helping students and faculty connect the dots between and across disciplines. By principle and training, libraries model diversity and inclusion in the collections we build, the exhibits we host, the talks we sponsor and, hopefully, the way we conduct

ourselves. Libraries should be safe havens for exploration and discovery for people from all backgrounds and from all points of view. We often lead the way in the innovative use of technology; monitoring technology trends and seeking to test and apply new technologies across all disciplines is something that we do almost without thinking. We support teaching in all modalities, face-to-face or online.

By ourselves, we can't cover all the bases of what our students and faculty need. But we are here for the common good, we know how to collaborate effectively (just look at the success of interlibrary loans, as one example), and we have wide-ranging expertise that should be tapped as a matter of course. We are ready, willing, and more than able to take part in the conversations and the planning to help our university be successful in providing an excellent education and life-changing experience for all of our students.