ASU Library as a Partner in the New American University: Changing to Thrive

Allison Leaming Malecki, Wes Edens, Mimmo Bonanni, and Tomalee Doan

abstract: Arizona State University (ASU) is known for both enormous size and scale, as well as excellence in research and innovation. These attributes are embodied in the ideal of the "New American University." ASU Library, as a partner in the New American University, has reorganized itself, completed a large-scale renovation of its main library building, and created interdisciplinary divisions of librarians and other professionals, backed up by subject "knowledge teams" that address specific research needs of faculty and students. As a result, the library has become involved in nontraditional projects across the university. This article is useful for libraries seeking to remain relevant and align themselves with institutional priorities.

Introduction

> ASU is a comprehensive public research university, *measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes* and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves. (Emphasis added.)
>
> *ASU Office of the President, "Mission and Goals"* [1]

Arizona State University (ASU), by way of its Charter, Mission, and Goals, has established itself as a model of the "New American University," a phrase coined by ASU President Michael Crow. The New American University is an institution that, among other things, is highly ranked in research while supporting inclusion in its admission processes and crossing traditional boundaries between disciplines to foster creativity and innovation. The result is a university that has a large, diverse, growing student population (especially online) and is highly ranked, according to several research metrics. As Crow explains, the New American University has involved a "recasting of the American research university as a complex and adaptive comprehensive knowledge

enterprise committed to discovery, creativity, and innovation, accessible to the broadest possible demographic, both socioeconomically and intellectually."[2]

Through a reorganization of staff and a physical renovation of its main library building (Hayden Library), Arizona State University Library has stepped forward to take its place in the New American University. By reorganizing staff, the library has increased the interdisciplinary focus and outreach of its librarians and other academic professionals. By repurposing space, it has transformed the traditional ways in which campus libraries function. Like much of the library profession, ASU Library has experimented with new approaches to remain relevant, including changing work habits, offering decentralized services, and creating innovative workflows. This case study will show how ASU Library has adapted to meet the aspirations of a research university that is challenging long-held assumptions.

ASU: A Case Study

Background and Motivation

ASU is unusual in both size and scale. Its four campuses, each with at least one library, span a distance of more than 49 miles in the Phoenix, Arizona, metropolitan area. The distance between campuses creates a logistical concern for librarians, partially offset by a free campus shuttle service and a municipal light rail system. In terms of enrollment, ASU is one of the largest public universities in the world, with a student population of over 121,000 in the fall of 2019.[3]

In 2020, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked Arizona State University as the "most innovative" university in the United States for the sixth year in a row.[4] This ranking, as well as much of the university's growth in enrollment, is made possible by such partnerships as the Starbucks College Achievement Plan, in which employees of Starbucks worldwide can be fully reimbursed for ASU Online degrees. The Earned Admission program is another innovative initiative that allows individuals, regardless of location or background,

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to take online classes for free, paying only for the courses for which they desire credit. ASU has also created the ASU and Uber Education Partnership in select cities, enabling Uber drivers and their families to take online undergraduate courses tuition-free. The Starbucks program, Earned Admission, and the ASU and Uber Education Partnership are examples of the tremendous reach and potential scale of the New American University.

ASU's model of inclusivity and diversity has led to increasing enrollment. The university had 46,795 students enrolled in degree programs administered by ASU Online[5] and 74,878 on ASU's metropolitan campuses as of fall 2019.[6] The university intends to continue growing, particularly in online and distance education programs, with the goal of enrolling at least 100,000

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students in these programs.[7] ASU's overall scale, geographic spread, and worldwide online population have prompted ASU Library to make deep changes in organization, physical spaces, and operations. One change was an extensive renovation of its largest library, Hayden Library on the Tempe campus.

Hayden Library Renovation

Hayden Library, originally completed in 1966, was renovated in 2018 and 2019 at a cost of $92 million. As part of the renovation, the library transferred a large portion of its book collection to high-density storage at ASU's Polytechnic Campus in Mesa, Arizona. The renovation moved much of the machinery of the library's physical plant outside the building, freeing up space to expand student seating, classrooms, and group study rooms. The library also redesigned its print collections to increase support for student success and encourage exploration.

Each floor of the Hayden Library became a separate "neighborhood." The fourth and highest floor is now dedicated to quiet study and scholarly materials, including a general collection of humanities-focused books. The third floor is highly collaborative and interactive; it features the library's Makerspace, Map and Geospatial Hub, and Unit for Data Science and Analytics. The second floor is designed to remind

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users of a comfortable public library, with a specially curated collection of books chosen to stimulate the imagination and spark curiosity through serendipitous discovery. The first floor showcases the library's Distinctive Collections and University Archives.

To enhance student comfort, the library now has multiple food and beverage outlets, gender-inclusive restrooms, lactation rooms, and a meditation space. A student can take classes in the library, meet with classmates, eat lunch, or simply relax. In the past, users had to enter Hayden Library by descending to a single belowground entrance, but the renovation restored ground-level access so users can enter or exit through multiple doors even with the terrain. The building has become much more energy-efficient and is certified LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum, the highest rank for environmental responsibility of a physical facility. This certification reinforces ASU's commitment to sustainability.

Reframing Library Work

The bold steps taken by ASU Library to become more relevant and contribute to the mission and vision of the New American University have also involved moving away from the traditional library model of reactively providing support services and toward a new, proactive model of partnering with students, faculty, departments, and the university's centers and institutes. With a growing student population and new schools and centers, the old model of simply adding more subject librarians was not sustainable. A more collaborative approach was needed to support the size and scale of ASU. Ongoing strategic planning has a road map for continuous change at ASU Library and has ensured a greater vision for ASU Library's overall future. Some subject librarians

initially resisted taking a more interdisciplinary approach to their work, but the strategic plan guided the change efforts by bringing disparate groups together to make positive changes in pursuit of a common goal.

The reconceptualization of librarian roles and responsibilities has required a new understanding of current services. Librarians now make bimonthly reports that answer questions about strategic priorities, in addition to addressing day-to-day responsibilities and professional development. For example, they regularly answer the question, "Did you establish new collaborations with researchers, faculty, instructors, or develop new partnerships within your target schools and colleges?" The strategic priorities flow from the Charter, Mission, and Goals of the overall institution, encapsulated in the model of the New American University. These priorities evolve over time, following the institutional values and organizational culture while adapting to the changing environment. For example, one of ASU's goals is to "Establish ASU as a leading global center for interdisciplinary research, discovery and development by 2025." The library has established three strategic priorities to support this goal: discovery of ASU research, access to ASU hosted content, and expanded reach. Under the third priority, expanded reach, the library details its ambition to "Build new relationships with faculty, researchers, and administrators across our campuses and programs, including ASU offices around the world, to integrate library services into new and nascent ASU programs." ASU Library underwent a staff reorganization that involved, among other changes, moving librarians from traditional subject roles into cross-disciplinary divisions.

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Over time, as ASU created more programs with an interdisciplinary focus, liaison librarians were challenged to meet new sets of needs. To satisfy these requirements, librarians from different subject areas and with various liaison duties came together to collaborate on complex projects. The library created four divisions: Humanities, Social Sciences, STEM, and E-Learning and Instruction. Each division focused on specific groups of users, including colleges, research centers, and special populations at ASU. For example, the Social Sciences Division serves the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, first-generation students, Disability Services users, and graduate students. The idea, in essence, is to collaborate to meet the research and curricular needs of these scholars.

After defining goals, the librarians within the divisions began to network and cooperate to address the research priorities of each division's users. Division members attended training on the Association of College and Research Libraries Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education to guide library instruction and reference and research services. Common protocols and standards facilitated collaboration among colleagues in assisting students, regardless of subject or discipline, to meet their interdisciplinary research needs.

At times, this change to an interdisciplinary focus was challenging for staff. The library implemented clear communication that considered staff concerns and instilled
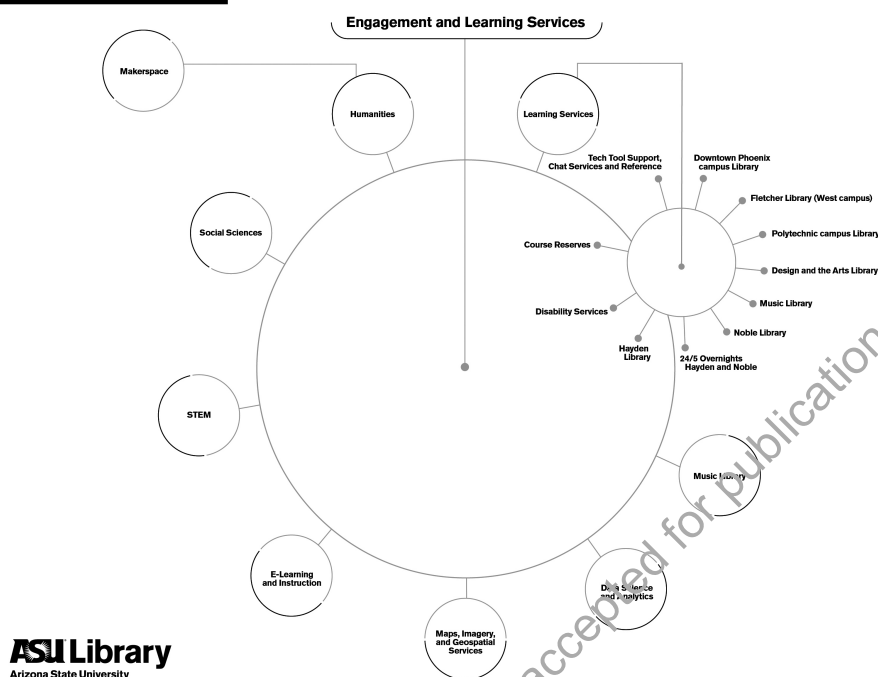
Organizational Chart

Figure 1. The organizational chart for Engagement and Learning Services at Arizona State University (ASU) Library.

an understanding of the process and desired outcomes. Except when equitable assignments needed to be assured, position descriptions and job titles did not change for liaison librarians. They continue to support schools, research centers, and special populations by developing relationships based on their subject expertise.

Previously, liaison librarians at ASU Library had been housed in a department called Academic Program Services. The department was oversized, with approximately 30 librarians reporting to one supervisor. Dividing this large department into divisions, each with a division head, afforded liaisons more individualized career guidance and attention from their supervisors. This structure also provided new mid-level leadership opportunities for librarians to supervise the divisions and led to more attention to personnel issues, annual reviews, and professional development. However, the main benefit of reorganizing the liaison librarians into four divisions proved to be increased motivation through affiliation. Strong relationships to their divisions allowed individual librarians to assist and collaborate within a cohort while also promoting collective effort and team identity within divisions. A powerful sense of connection lessened conflict and enabled team development to evolve quickly.

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Consolidating the Library Role in Teaching and Learning

The right people are the key to positive change, and turnover and retirements meant that ASU Library was in the position to hire new leadership. The library adjusted titles when people with specific skills came aboard, and new hires included library strategists who understood the role of the library in the New American University and then translated this vision into action. The challenges of overall scale, the distance between campuses, and the transition to online services meant that new leadership needed to reshape long-standing structures to produce a new kind of readiness to serve the changing needs of faculty and students.

ASU Library filled several upper and mid-level management positions, structuring interviews to learn more about the candidates and the potential to turn their capabilities into the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to lead the library through a complete reinvention. The interview process focused discussions on how to improve service, search for solutions, and work toward inclusivity in the library workplace. Once hired, some staff had their titles and duties altered to match their strengths, which required other searches to reopen to find emergent leaders with the necessary leadership competencies to reorganize space and staff.

Libraries increasingly identify research support as a specific area that requires the coordination and strategic development of research data management, open scholarship, citation analysis, and copyright, among other areas.[8] To address research support needs, ASU Library realigned its liaison librarians into cross-functional divisions. This was not simply a shift on an organizational chart, but a fundamental change in how the library approached its work. As liaison responsibilities were realigned, interdisciplinarity—a hallmark feature of the New American University—became easier to support. The library created "knowledge teams" populated by librarians with extensive subject-specific research skills to cut across divisions. The knowledge teams strengthened existing connections to colleges and departments and provided more consistent subject expertise to faculty and students by reducing reliance on single points of contact. Knowledge teams also collaborated by streamlining collections processes and addressing specialized reference and research requests through a newly designed, tiered reference system.

Initially, the library management team looked at how subjects were assigned to liaisons, asking liaisons to detail their interests and subject expertise regardless of their assignment at the time. Library management aligned and grouped subject expertise into eight broad subject areas, including anthropology, area studies, languages and history, and religion and philosophy. Liaisons worked together as knowledge teams, focusing on collection development

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and faculty and student engagement. Each knowledge team had goals, including revising library guides, reviewing acquisition policies, and engaging in journal acquisition projects. Feedback and experience from the liaisons eventually led to the consolidation of eight teams into a more focused set of six knowledge teams.
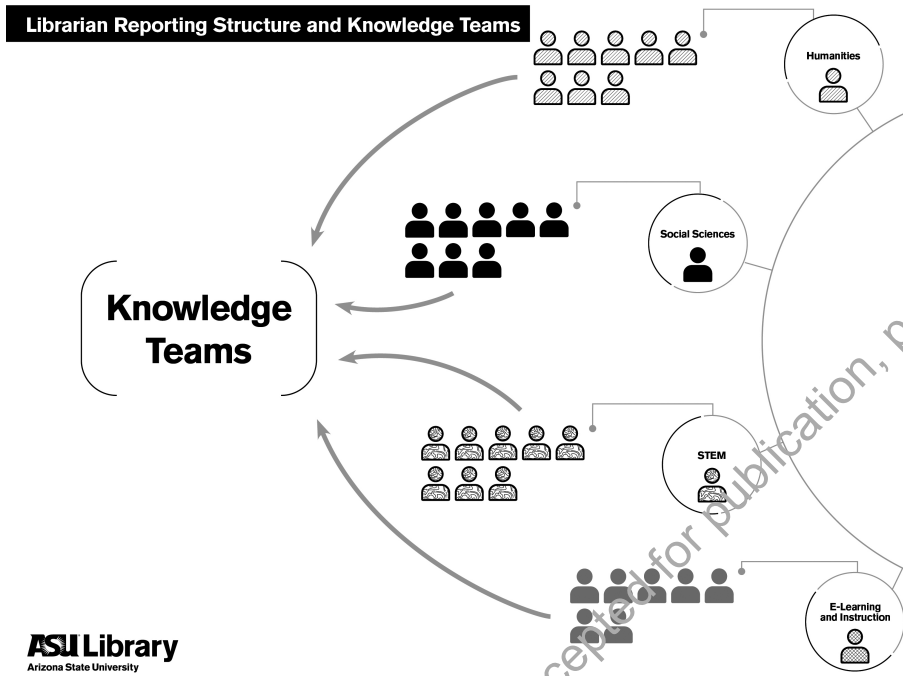
Figure 2. The librarian reporting structure and knowledge teams at Arizona State University (ASU) Library.
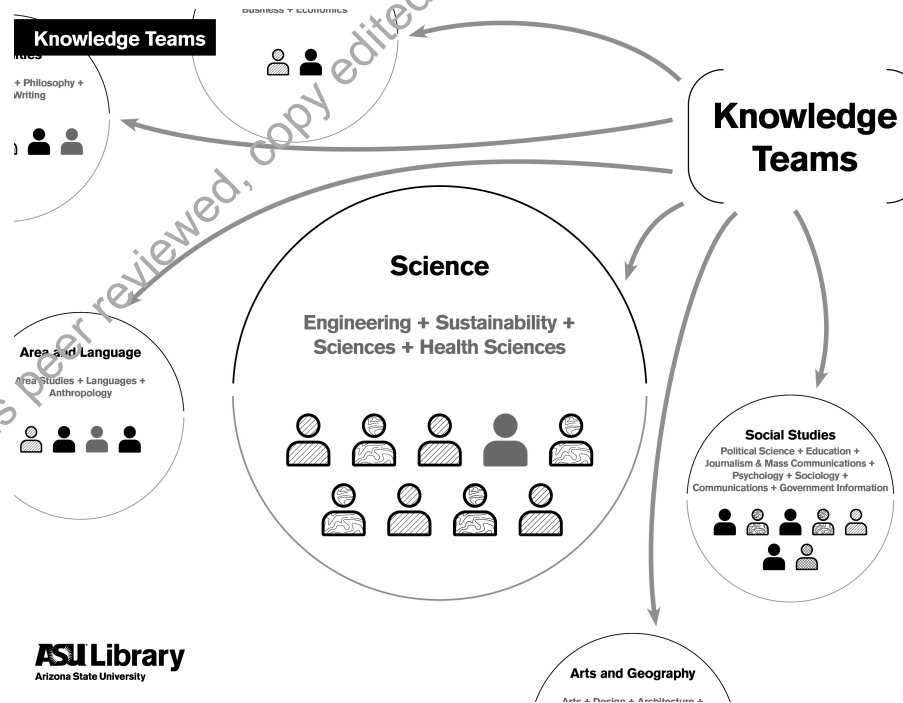

Figure 3. The knowledge teams at Arizona State University (ASU) Library.

The leadership of these knowledge teams has evolved since their inception. Initially, they were the responsibility of the division heads. Over time, division heads stepped back, and the six teams began to self-manage, with one member of each team taking on the lead role. Knowledge team leaders serve for one-year terms and represent their teams at meetings and in communications. The relationship between knowledge teams and divisions is flexible, responding and adapting to the changing needs of the faculty, students, and the institution as needed.

To better address the needs of online students while also providing e-learning tools to all ASU students, ASU Library created a new unit focused on scalable solutions, such as tutorials and microcredentials. Microcredentials are verified proofs of competency in a specific skill, based on completion of a learning program. They can be attained by any student and provide a cost-effective way to showcase information literacy skills or other competencies. This approach works in conjunction with the library's goals of providing both research assistance and online instruction. The creation of an E-Learning and Instruction Division that combines librarian expertise with multimedia and instructional design personnel was crucial to the implementation of these new services and led to a stronger service presence for the library's online offerings.

To support the interdisciplinary process for ASU students, the library also created an interactive, collaborative Makerspace service point, which offers a place for ASU students "to meet, share and collaborate with people from other fields and disciplines in order to learn new skills, create new things, and advance both your personal and professional projects."[9] The Makerspace was lauded in 2020 for quickly switching from experimental prototype design to practical problem-solving, producing face masks and face shields for health care workers on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The library's units for data science and geographic information system (GIS) support researchers across disciplines and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. Data Science and Analytics brings together students, staff, and faculty to learn and apply data science research to real-world problems. Maps, Imagery, and Geospatial Services uses maps, satellite and aerial imagery, and other data to collaborate on interdisciplinary research projects. These library-based centers are separate from the four divisions, working both independently and in conjunction with librarians to enhance the library's ability to connect and collaborate.

The library's collaboration with ASU Knowledge Enterprise has also led to new partnerships within the university and its community. Knowledge Enterprise values the role librarians play within the research life cycle, and librarians work with Research Advancement Services staff, part of Knowledge Enterprise, to provide guidance and best practices in research data management to establish the library as a trusted partner in research. As a result of this partnership, ASU Library supports researchers throughout the grant process. The library is recognized as a valued core service that can identify opportunities, inform proposals, help with conducting and publishing research, and provide "a nexus, as both a physical and virtual interdisciplinary hub, that encourages collaboration among scholars inside the university and without."[10]

Connecting to Users

The organization of librarians into interdisciplinary divisions, backed by specialized knowledge teams, has allowed the library to more effectively permeate the overall university organization. The divisions promote a natural cross-pollination of ideas and projects among the members, while knowledge teams allow librarians to apply their deep subject knowledge when and where it is needed most. Following are a few examples of how this ethos of collaboration and outreach works at ASU.

Barrett, the Honors College

ASU Library has partnered with ASU's elite Honors College, Barrett, on several projects. In an ongoing collaboration, librarians teach information literacy skills to a select group of honors students as a thesis prerequisite. These students, called Barrett Peer Mentors, then teach the skills to their peers. This successful peer-tutoring model has become a standard for future partnerships with other colleges at ASU. The library works with the Honors College on curating an honors thesis repository, which is used by students as a tool to support current and future research at the college. The library is also piloting a one-credit information literacy class with a selection of honors students. This collaborative pilot has led to a better understanding of the information literacy needs of Barrett students, and librarians plan to expand the course to teach information literacy skills to the entire Honors College.

Humanities Lab

The Humanities Lab at ASU provides innovative, interdisciplinary courses that address social problems. ASU Library collaborates with the lab by matching liaison librarians with instructors based on librarian expertise and interest. This ongoing project involves librarians early in course development to ensure that information literacy is built into course learning outcomes. Librarians are deeply embedded in the labs and make substantial contributions, attending class sessions, leading class discussions and workshops, and providing instruction. One librarian worked closely with a humanities professor on a lab syllabus, including information literacy principles and learning outcomes in a food culture lab, and met with students working on a digital food desert project in central Phoenix. The students provided research help using economic anthropology resources to study the influence of cooperative farming and indigenous crop farming on local food markets. This type of activity fulfills a core aspect of the ASU Charter, assuming responsibility for the economic, social, cultural, and overall health of the communities that ASU serves.

Embedded Activities

Librarians are strongly encouraged and supported in outreach and engagement activities. A liaison librarian with business expertise has established strong working relationships with ASU's W. P. Carey School of Business via an in-depth orientation for MBA students as well as holding regular office hours inside the school. Other librarians are embedded in schools and colleges in a multitude of ways, ranging from holding office hours to serving

as department faculty, including instructing a for-credit, graduate-level class that integrates digital humanities methods into academic research. Working physically in the same space as faculty, students, and staff fosters ad hoc conversations and collaboration on a wide variety of projects. Frequent face-to-face contact with faculty and staff naturally leads to information-sharing

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and opportunities for engagement, both formal and informal. Embedded librarians are part of subject-specific knowledge teams that work on collection development, vendor relations, and reference requests that require advanced expertise.

Curated Collections

ASU Library actively works with faculty to ensure that its collections support faculty syllabus and curriculum needs, and librarians have partnered on several projects. Working closely with the library's curation specialists, librarians and members of academic departments have cocreated specialized collections and displays. For example, two librarians worked with a curation specialist to develop *Fire and Ice*, a multimedia, cross-disciplinary exhibit on climate change with a broad range of materials and opportunities for patron interactivity via kiosks. This exhibit was converted to a purely digital display due to COVID-19. Another librarian worked with curators to develop and install a collection for a class on the history of the American West. The librarian selected supplementary print materials from the library's holdings for the class and exhibited them in the library. The collection included books, movies, games, and graphic novels to support students taking the class, as well as community users interested in the lore of the Old West.

Challenges

Managing Change

Sarah Michalak provides a long list of features rooted in an academic library that resist change: "acres of print collections; aging and inflexible buildings; state and private institutional governance structures that include outdated personnel and financial regulations; multiple conflicting customer profiles; and, not least, librarians' own perceptions and biases."[11] Library employees vary in their level of readiness to deal with the complexities of change. To transform library culture, managers need to draw on the individual strengths

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of early adopters, cultivate buy-in from skeptics, and allow employees to lead in areas where positive change can happen. This approach motivates employees to assume new

roles and responsibilities. For example, the former government documents librarian undertook a significant career pivot to lead the library's citizen science initiatives as part of his division's work with ASU's School for the Future of Innovation in Society. Although this endeavor was unfamiliar territory, it has led to professional success at local, regional, national, and international levels for both the librarian and ASU Library.

Teamwork

Participating in teams is part of the job for most library staff, but it particularly comes into focus for librarians with shifting priorities and cross-functional team responsibilities. Many new teams have been created as ASU Library regroups based on function. Old library operation models do not work in distributed work place settings. The staff reorganization necessitated more frequent engagement with Web-based collaboration tools, such as Slack, SharePoint, and Zoom, which allowed for new and increased communication that promotes team building. Because trust among team members leads to greater satisfaction and better performance, creating a culture of trust within these newly formed and less homogenous groups is key to their success and organizational gains.

Communication

Successful change requires excellent internal communication. Leaders are challenged to design clear and consistent messaging that communicates the organization's vision and strategic priorities that speak to each staff member personally. Organizations foster trust and acceptance of change by being open, honest, and reciprocal in communication. Library staff will more likely advocate for change when organizational communication is open and participative.

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Before the reorganization at ASU Library, most supervisors had so many direct reports that frequent one-on-one meetings were not practical. After the reorganization, one-on-one meetings became commonplace and increased the level of communication and trust throughout the organization.

Conclusion

Reorganizing staff, repurposing space, and changing workflows are steps that ASU Library has enacted to align with the vision and goals of the New American University. The most important change has been to reshape the ASU Library into a more collaborative, interdisciplinary model, including dynamic teams that are better suited to serve ASU students and curriculum. Interdisciplinary divisions facilitate the sharing of ideas and projects among librarians and faculty. Collaborative projects have enhanced the library's ability to deal with the complex challenges confronting today's university libraries and staff. Challenges that must be faced include managing change, building effective teams, and improving communication, but the investment necessary to reorganize staff, space,

and workflows is worthwhile. Innovation in library services and leadership empowers libraries and staff to overcome challenges, seize upon collaborative opportunities, and provide quality services to our users.

Allison Leaming Malecki is an associate librarian at Arizona State University in Tempe. Her ORCID ID is https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6057-9398, and she may be reached by e-mail at: allison.malecki@asu.edu.

Wes Edens is a liaison librarian in the Social Sciences Division of Arizona State University in Tempe. His ORCID ID is https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8614-8289, and he may be reached by e-mail at: wes.edens@asu.edu.

Mimmo Bonanni is an associate liaison librarian in the Social Sciences Division of Arizona State University in Tempe. His ORCID ID is https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0365-9594, and he may be reached by e-mail at: mimmo@asu.edu.

Tomalee Doan is a former associate university librarian for Engagement and Learning Services at Arizona State University in Tempe and a former member of the Editorial Board of portal: Libraries and the Academy.

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