

Developing a Strategic Plan to Streamline the Circulation Department of the University of California,
Hastings College of the Law Library

Part Two: Strategic Goals, Assessments and Annotated Bibliography

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Abstract

This report—part two of two— proposes strategies by which the University of California, Hastings College of the Law Library may streamline its circulation department in response to continuing budget cuts and financial constraints. The first section of this report builds on the environmental scan, SWOT analysis, literature and mission statement reviews conducted in part one of our plan, while the second section contains an annotated bibliography of the literature consulted in preparing this report.

Keywords: law library, Hastings Law Library, circulation, reference, technology, budget issues, student employees, strategic plan.

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This report—part two of two—presents five possible goals towards which the Hastings law library might work in order to meet their objective of streamlining the library’s circulation department. Our analysis of each goal will include a series of proposed objectives, an action plan for implementing each objective, and a method of assessing the success of the action plan. In Goal 1 we propose that the law library consolidate its circulation, reference and inter-library loan (ILL) departments into one “access services” department; in Goal 2 we suggest that the library implement a public-awareness campaign to alert library users to the benefits of the new access services department; Goal 3 explores methods by which the circulation department may continue to improve the efficiency and usefulness of its existing technology; Goal 4 suggests fostering a collaborative environment between the library’s full-time and student employees in order to build strong relationships within the library; and in Goal 5 we suggest that, in order to fill a gap in the academic literature, the library create and publish a “best practices” guide for academic law libraries’ circulation departments.

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Goals and Objectives

GOAL 1: Consolidate the circulation, reference desk services, and inter-library loan (ILL) departments into one to “access services” department.

Objective 1.1: *Begin the process of merging the circulation, reference services and ILL departments.*

Action Plan: A variety of factors have contributed to a recent trend in academic (university) libraries merging their circulation and ILL departments (Alarid, T.M. & Sullivan, C.A., 2009, Austin, B., 2010, et al.). As electronic resources have become more available to library users and traditional circulation tasks become automated, the demand for circulation services has decreased (Austin, B., 2010, Tolppanen, B.P., 2004, et al.). While increased access to electronic resources has lessened the demand for circulation services, it has led to an increase in inter-library loan requests; and resulted in circulation and ILL departments often performing similar document handling functions (Austin, B., 2010, Tolppanen, B.P., 2004, et al.).

The general trend does not necessarily include merging public reference desk services with circulation and ILL, however we recommend that Hastings do so at least in part. Hastings' library's public reference desk is physically adjacent to its circulation desk. Although the reference librarians are responsible primarily for assisting professors in their research, they are required to spend a certain amount of the day "manning" the reference desk. Rather than interrupt the reference librarians' primary tasks, the library could separate the public reference desk services from the larger reference department and incorporate into access services. By training part-time student workers to answer basic reference questions as a function of access services, the library would free the reference librarians to concentrate on their primary projects. Each reference librarian, while working in their offices, could be available for more complex issues during a certain portion of the day (see Objective 1.3).

Assessment: Objective 1.1 is a cornerstone of the remaining goals and objectives in this strategic plan. It will be assessed by the completion of departmental restructuring at the Hastings Library, as well as the success of the supporting goals and objectives as described below. And you could determine timeline in consultation with Law Library administration.

Objective 1.2: *Hire a part-time, non-librarian in the access services department as “student staff coordinator.”*

Action Plan: The Hastings circulation librarian currently spends a large amount of his time managing the student staff. While management is necessary, it does not need to be performed by an academic library professional. Hiring a separate, non-professional employee to coordinate student staff in access services would allow the professional librarians to focus on duties more in line with their job descriptions. The role of the student staff coordinator would include hiring, supervising, scheduling, coordinating trainings, and rectifying time cards in preparation for payroll.

Assessment: Following through with this objective will likely increase the library’s staffing expenses; any assessment strategy must include methods of demonstrating concrete, measurable results. We suggest that the newly hired student staff coordinator keep a log of his or her tasks and the time spent performing those tasks. Using this data, the professional access services staff should conduct periodic evaluations of the usefulness of the new position in order to determine if the position should be kept.

Objective 1.3: *Cross-train circulation student staff in ILL and reference desk services as part of the new access services department.*

Action Plan: The new access services department will be of particular benefit to Hastings library's existing ILL and reference desk services departments by providing them with help from student staff (they currently have none). While student staff focuses on day-to-day tasks within ILL and reference desk services, professional staff will have more time to focus on long-term goals, or special projects that increase the value of the department to its stakeholders. In order for current circulation student staff to work effectively in ILL or reference desk services, they must be cross-trained (Alarid, T.M. & Sullivan, C.A., 2009, Austin, B., 2010, et al.). The heads of circulation, ILL, and reference should agree on core student staffing tasks and decide on the best methods for training the existing student staff on these additional functions. The access services department should put together a manual and training presentation for its student workers by the end of its first operational year after a period of observation of the new department's procedures.

Assessment: This objective may be evaluated after successful completion of an access services student staff training manual and training presentation. The student staff may be asked to give feedback as to the usefulness of the material immediately following the initial training presentation, and to provide follow-up feedback three months into their employment. Access services should also have a visible suggestion box for student staff to give input as needed. Evaluation of student training program could also be explicitly linked to evaluation of student worker performance – which, I think, is assumed here. The value of doing so would be to formally link training and performance, rather than assessing training only.

Objective 1.4: *Increase the access services department's stake in the library by allowing its staff to play a larger role in the collection development department's recommendation and decision-making process.*

Action Plan: At many universities, circulation and access services department staff are actively involved in their library's collection development and view circulation data as an essential component in the collection process (Knievel, J., Wicht, H. & Connaway, L., 2006). The Hastings library could adopt this policy by including access services professional staff in collection development meetings, memos, reports, etc. Access services may also support collection development by producing a bi-annual circulation report, which could detail short-term trends and provide data for analysis. Over time, issues of this report would document and justify the library's collection development decisions. While this objective will require more time and effort from access services staff, it will also give them an opportunity to be involved in the future of the library at a higher level of planning. This is an excellent way to expand both evidence-based decision making and 'holistic' (systems) thinking by formally integrating access services (which is often marginalized) into collection development advisement. Perhaps they could also support reference question analysis and support activities that predict collection needs as well as expertise needs.

Assessment: This objective will be assessed using circulation reports, meeting minutes or other documents which show access services participation in collections development. This should be two way – so evidence also needs to show that collection development listens.

GOAL 2: *Demonstrate the value of the Hastings law library and, specifically, the access services department, to the Hastings community.*

Objective 2.1: *Write a corollary mission statement for the access services department. Align this corollary statement to the core mission statement of the Hastings law library, as well as that of the college. Be specific in stating the manner in which the Access Services Department is essential to the mission of both the library and campus.*

Action Plan: A mission statement is valuable in demonstrating the benefit of the organization it describes, both to the outside community and to its own staff. Creating a corollary mission statement for the access services department serves a two-fold purpose: it enlightens the Hastings community about the role of access services and gives significance to staff positions within the department. This is an important component of Goal 2: in order to market itself successfully, the new department must have a defined purpose. The corollary mission statement may also be used to justify department funding. Although it does not need to be exhaustive, the mission statement should outline the services provided by access services and include a description of the manner in which each of these services furthers the mission of the library and the campus as a whole. At the last two organizations where I have worked, we realized that our strategic plans did not include the work that consumes the most fiscal and human resources – and this includes access services functions. So your suggestion is a good one – especially given its alignment with larger plan.

Assessment: A copy of the corollary mission statement will serve as the main assessment for Objective 2.1. In addition, this objective may be evaluated by noting the medium in which the mission statement is presented (e.g. the Hastings library website, internal documents or brochures). The department may also include questions related to

assessing the impact of promoting the new mission statement in the surveys or focus groups described below (see Objective 2.2).

Objective 2.2: *Gather information from stakeholders about possible improvements for member services; information may include stakeholder surveys and interviews as well as statistical data from the access services department.*

Action Plan: The Hastings law library serves a community which includes faculty, administrators, college and library staff, students, alumnae, and members of the San Francisco legal community. These are considered stakeholders, in that the effectiveness of the services provided by library departments will have an impact on the community's use of library resources for research and professional purposes. In order to demonstrate its value, the access services department should develop a systematic method of obtaining information from stakeholders. Validating its role will require working "for and with users" and learning as much as possible about how the services it provides meet the needs of faculty and students (Somerville, 2009, p. 1).

The access services department may gather the information it needs from various sources:

- Department staff: the department has an excellent staff of full-time professional employees and part-time student employees. Staff members who are close to the day-to-day operations of the department are in the best position to offer ideas for evaluating procedures and services and making recommendations for change. The department should develop a regular method of maintaining open communication with all staff members, ensuring that these staff members have opportunities to assess the

department's services and make recommendations for means of improving and streamlining the department's procedures.

- Stakeholder responses: the department should do everything possible to learn how its services support the goals of faculty and students. Online surveys and focus groups may be used to help the department identify which services are most valued by its users. In interviews with students open-ended questions will help to elicit information about their use of the department's services. Interviews with faculty members should attempt to learn what services provided by the department help them to meet their teaching and research responsibilities.

Assessment: Assessment will include records of surveys and interviews, records of staff input, and monitoring of changes and improvements made in response to input from library staff and users of library services.

Objective 2.3: *Maintain a good working relationship with other campus departments and faculty members in order to ensure that other departments are aware of the value of access services.*

Action Plan: The access services department will play a crucial role in serving the needs of faculty, students and professional users. Department staff must continue to educate users about the value of its services, and continue to learn from those users different methods by which its services may be improved. Budget decisions affecting the library are made at other levels of the school administration. In order to describe the access services department's value to the school community effectively, department staff should educate themselves about the larger fiscal needs driving the administration's

budgetary decisions. The department librarians could schedule and hold interviews with faculty members, administrators, and other college staff members to ascertain which services are most used and valued. Interviews may provide opportunities for access services department staff to educate other college staff members about the value of its services.

Assessment: The access services department staff's review and evaluation of records of interviews will ensure that the department makes informed decisions about adjustments and changes in services.

Objective 2.4: *Prepare a concise and persuasive set of “talking points” that will help the department communicate its value to the school community.*

Action Plan: Library users and other members of the campus community may not be clear about the value and usefulness of the access services department. Marketing the department to its stakeholders will be crucial to demonstrating its relevance and value. As budget decisions are being made, the department should prepare a concise and persuasive list of descriptions of the services that it provides and the value of those services to the school community.

Because librarians and school administrators often differ in their understanding of the librarians' roles, the department must frame its self-description in a way that reflects and supports the priorities of the law school. The list should include a series of “talking points” which may be used in presentations and discussions with college administrators, staff and faculty members. The talking points should be concise, memorable, and closely aligned with the larger goals of Hastings College. The final list

should be made available to all library users in the form of flyers as well as being displayed in a prominent position on the department's web site.

Assessment: Assessment of the library's success in implementing this goal will be based on the list of talking points it develops, and the extent to which the department's self-description reflects the goals of Hastings College. Means of assessment will include records of the use of these talking points in meetings and other interactions with members of the school community.

GOAL 3: Continue to improve the efficiency and usefulness of the department's existing technology.

Objective 3.1: *Ensure that both full and part-time staff is trained on the department's current technology; maintain contact with software representatives to keep apprised of on-line training resources.*

Action Plan: Hastings has recently upgraded its integrated library system (ILS) software. It is now using Encore with Synergy—Innovative Interface's recent product. As the circulation department continues to update its ILS software, it should offer full and part-time staff periodic training and refresher courses. In order to take full advantage of its new software, circulation staff should foster communication with ILS representatives and keep apprised of the software company's online customer service resources.

Assessment: Create and maintain a "skills checklist" and regularly assess staff proficiency.

Objective 3.2: *Encourage university administrators to replace antiquated student worker time-clock with a more efficient, computerized system.*

Action Plan: The department staff could file a formal petition with the campus work study program requesting an upgrade of their time-clock technology. The petition could identify and explain the inefficiencies of the current system and suggest alternate time keeping systems (see Part I of this report).

Assessment: Although the circulation department will have little control over the implementation of this objective, the librarian should “go on record” as being dissatisfied with the current system.

Objective 3.3: *As new software upgrades become available, the department should continue to upgrade their ILS system.*

Action Plan: The department should develop a process by which it continues to review developments in ILS technology with the goal of upgrading its system periodically.

Assessment: The success of this objective will be measured by regular assessments of the usefulness of the current technology.

GOAL 4: *Foster a collaborative work environment that creates strong professional relationships within the library.*

Objective 4.1: *Provide professional staff development opportunities to improve the quality of library services.*

Action Plan: Provide professional staff development opportunities to encourage employees to think creatively and work with dedication during these times of budget cuts. Professional staff development will also improve the quality of library services by helping employees remain apprised of current trends in their field.

Assessment: Continue to check for updates in the library field and ensure that new technology is updated in the library. Ensure that employees are given the freedom to take classes and seminars to continue to keep up to date with all technology in their particular field of librarianship. Keep professional development opportunities posted on a bulletin board so that all employees that are interested in upcoming courses or seminars are able to sign up and attend. Professional development is essential in these times of rapidly changes in information environment and library circumstances.

Objective 4.2: *Provide professional work experience and mentoring to student employees to encourage employee retention.*

Action Plan: During these times of budget constraints and downsizing, it is important to maintain staff morale and foster a strong working relationship between the full-time staff and student workers. Offering student workers opportunities for professional development and mentoring will assist the library in retention of its student employees (Maxey-Harris, Cross, and McFarland, 2010). In order to encourage student worker retention, the law library should consider implementing automatic pay raises as the students transition from their second to third year. The library is the only campus department with no automatic raises, which has made it difficult to attract and retain student workers.

Because Hastings College discourages its first year law students from obtaining work-study positions, the library is limited to hiring second and third year students. At the end of each year, half of the library's trained student staff graduates and the circulation librarian is left with a staffing shortage at the beginning of the school year. If the library were able to petition the university to allow first year law students in their

second semester to work limited hours, the department could maintain a greater number of student staff at the end of each year and partially reduce their traditional fall semester worker shortages.

Assessment: This objective may be considered successful if the library is able to maintain a greater number of its student staff each year.

Objective 4.3: *Prepare for reduced levels of funding by creating a budget which includes a contingency plan to allow for a flexible response to financial cuts within the department.*

Action Plan: Develop comparative data to ascertain the operating budget of the circulation department relative to the budgets of other departments at Hastings and similar departments at similar law school libraries. The department may consult other academic law libraries in comparable institutions to develop a profile of standard and reasonable costs for circulation departments. This comparative data will assist the department in advocating for its service and staffing levels during budget negotiations. Budgetary planning should also identify services which, in the event of reductions in funding, can be modified or eliminated with less of a negative impact on essential services, while clearly identifying services essential to the department.

Assessment: The completed budget should reflect the law library's assessment of the costs of maintaining the department in relation to the costs incurred by other college departments and by circulation departments in comparable academic law libraries. The planning will include a realistic view of the circulation department's future in the face of fiscal uncertainties.

GOAL 5: *Create and publish a “best practices” guide for academic law libraries’ circulation departments, in order to fill a gap in the existing academic literature.*

Objective 5.1: *Conduct a formal study of existing academic law library circulation departments.*

Action Plan: Enlist the support of circulation librarians in academic law libraries around the country by sending a formal description of the goals and purposes of the proposed study. Create a sample group of law librarians who will agree to be interviewed about the current practices and problems of running their circulation departments.

Assessment: Prior to beginning the study, perform an informal survey among circulation librarians about their current practices in order to create a template with consistent questions for the formal study. Foster excellent communication with the sample group to ensure participants respond in a timely manner.

Objective 5.2: *Review existing academic literature about current trends and practices in the circulation departments of general (non-law school affiliated) academic libraries.*

Action Plan: Although there are currently no published studies of best practices for the circulation departments of academic law libraries, there is a great deal of literature describing the current trends in the circulation departments of general university libraries (see Annotated Bibliography). After reviewing the literature, compile a list of current trends and query the sample group about their impressions of these trends in terms of the usefulness to their departments.

Assessment: Compile enough information to present a comparison of the circulation departments of general academic libraries with their law library counter-parts. Identify

areas in which the libraries are similar and identify any needs and problems that are unique to academic law libraries.

Objective 5.3: *Using the literature comparison and the responses from the sample group, complete an analysis of a series of proposed best practices.*

Action Plan: Write a final report that includes a description of the current circulation department problems, the sample survey, the literature discussion, and an analysis of the proposed best practices for academic law library circulation departments. Because of budget sensitivities, the study may be conducted and prepared by law or library students as part of an independent study. Although a staff librarian will be needed to supervise the project, offering students academic credit for completing the study will reduce the costs of the project by eliminating the need to pull staff librarians off of more pressing projects.

Assessment: The supervising librarians will perform a final edit of the study in preparation for publication. Nice! It will educate and position law librarians well!

Annotated Bibliography

Alarid, T. M., & Sullivan, C. A. (2009). Welcome to the neighborhood: The merger of interlibrary loan with access services. *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserve*, 19(3), 219–225. doi: 10.1080/10723030903001065

In addition to a concise but thorough literature review, Alarid and Sullivan evaluate an ILL/access services merge at the University of Denver Penrose Library. They found that cross-training staff—both student and professional—was particularly beneficial, and that the merge allowed for a reduction in total staff hours (of the access services department) by 37.5 hours per week. Patrons appreciated the merge and found that the new combined services desk offered a centralized location to meet all of their needs. This article also addresses student staff supervision in the combined service setting—a topic which the Hastings Library may find particularly relevant.

Austin, B. (2010). Moving beyond the amalgam: Restructuring access services. *Journal of Access Services*, 7(3), 145–158. doi: 10.1080/15367961003708763

Although academic libraries have seen a general trend to combine various functions under “Access Services” over the past 20 years, the combination of functions does not always mean the combination of departments. Austin analyzes a case study at the University of Colorado, Boulder, which merged ILL and circulation services into “Circulation and Interlibrary Loan,” but kept the two original departments separate. He found that initially the separation resulted in no workflow efficiency improvements; later, after a period of workflow analysis, the library identified areas to adjust and created a “materials management center” to streamline materials handling. In this new system, the circulation and ILL departments still remained distinct, but

shared student staff. The article articulates specific issues with merging services, which is useful in considering or planning such a move.

Carver, D. A. (2010). Organizational models and roles. *Journal of Access Services*, 7(2), 72–83. doi: 10.1080/15367961003618558

Carver reviews the roles of and trends in academic circulation departments both historically and with a future perspective. She argues that the transition from fixed routines to fluid organizational structures will create more responsive departments with more satisfied staff. Along these lines, she suggests rigid policies be replaced by best practices. The “Future Roles and Opportunities” section of the article proposes broad but very relevant suggestions that apply to the Hastings Library Circulation Department.

Field Poll. (2012, September 20). California’s tax initiatives. Release #2425. Retrieved from <http://field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/Rls2425.pdf>.

This is the most recent report of data on the tax initiatives by the Field Poll, an independent, non-partisan, media-sponsored public opinion news service. The report consists of text and statistical data, and includes a background section providing details about the interviewing method, sample size, question wording and other technical data. Hastings may find this article interesting as it relates to one of their primary funding sources.

Fitchett, T., Hambleton, J., Hazelton, P., Klinefelter, A., & Wright, J. (2011). Law library budgets in hard times. *Law Library Journal*, 103(1), 91–111. Retrieved from

<http://www.lexisnexis.com.libaccess.sjlibrary.org/hottopics/lnacademic/?verb=sr&csi=145277>

Five academic law library professionals analyze the challenges raised by the current economic climate and discuss methods by which libraries may adjust to reduced resources, including rethinking traditional organizational structures and job responsibilities, connecting libraries’

goals and objectives closely to those of the law schools they serve, and developing strategies for collaboration and partnership.

Henning, M. M. (2000). Expanding the role of the student desk assistant in the electronic environment. *College and Undergraduate Libraries*, 7(1), 11–24. doi: 10.1300/J106v07n01_02

Henning examines the student circulation desk assistant, and how emerging technologies have expanded his/her role in meeting information needs of library users. Several before-and-after scenarios are considered to illustrate libraries' changing practices to reflect changing needs.

Henning concludes by suggesting the importance of training in optimizing the use of student assistants' time and skills.

Kelsh, V. J. (2005). The law library mission statement. *Law Library Journal*, 97(2), 323–334.

Retrieved from

http://heinonlinebackup.com/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/lj97§ion=24

Kelsh provides a basic overview of the importance of mission statements in a law library setting, as well as details on how to craft an impactful mission statement. She notes that not only do mission statements give the library a sense of direction and justification for funding, they also provide a basis for marketing library services. Throughout the article, Kelsh supports her recommendations with relevant examples from existing law library mission statements, giving the reader a good comparison. This article is more than an introduction to mission statements in the law library environment; it is a handy quick-reference guide to creating such a mission statement. As the Hastings Library circulation department moves toward accomplishing Objective 2.1 Kelsh's article should provide an excellent starting point, as well as continued direction. Yes, a good foundation!

Knievel, J., Wicht, H., & Connaway, L. (2006). Use of circulation statistics and interlibrary loan data in collection management. *College & Research Libraries*, 67(1), 35–39. Retrieved from <http://crl.acrl.org/content/67/1/35.short>

Through analysis of circulation and ILL statistics at the University of Colorado at Boulder library, the authors came to several core conclusions about methodology and usefulness of statistical data for library planning purposes. Specifically, they determined that it is important to rely on data-driven collections management—particularly as opposed to faculty recommendation—in today’s economic climate, and that the circulation and ILL departments can provide this data. The authors’ Boulder library case study provides a useful comparison for Hastings library’s discussion on circulation best practices.

Maxey-Harris, C., Cross, J., McFarland, T. (2010). Student workers: the untapped resource for library professions. *Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries*. Paper 269. doi: 10.1353/lib.2010.0021

Maxey-Harris et al. focus on retaining and mentoring student employees of academic libraries so that the students gain practical work experience, team building and organizational skills and possible supervisory experience. The key to retaining students “...and recruiting them into the library field is to provide stimulating work and inform them about career opportunities” (p. 150). By offering student staff a good working environment with encouraging staff, mentoring, flexible hours, etc., Hastings may increase employee satisfaction and retention.

Seer, G. (2004). No pain, no gain: Stretching the library dollar. *Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances, The*. 17(1), 10–14. doi: [10.1108/08880450410519647](https://doi.org/10.1108/08880450410519647)

Seer suggests that law librarians faced with the need to cut costs must cultivate relationships with other departments and decision makers, make changes that reflect the needs of library service users, and focus on areas that they can actually control. In Seer’s case study, the

librarian at a corporate company law library made sure that none of the cuts seriously impaired the patrons' ability to do their research before instituting subscription changes. This article may assist the Hastings library with ideas for reducing unnecessary print materials, while also negotiating better pricing on its remaining resources.

Su, M. (2008). Beyond circulation: The evolution of access services and its relationship to reference librarianship. *Reference Librarian*, 49(1), 77–86. doi: 10.1080/02763870802103795

Su explores the implications of merging reference and circulation services while forging collaboration among reference, circulation, and interlibrary loan services. The article suggests that integration of services is reasonable, and may provide the organizational change needed in difficult budgetary times.

Tolppanen, B.P. (2004). A survey of current tasks and future trends in access services. *Journal of Access Services*, 2(3), 1–14. doi: 10.1300/J204v02n03_01

Tolppanen's survey is an excellent comparison of the tasks currently performed by access services departments and the functions these departments expect to increase or decline. The article is readable and easy to reference, with detailed data tables as well as a succinct summary of the important findings. The author determines that primary access services tasks are split between "making information available to user," and "facilities management." His discussion on the core tasks within these categories, as well as their trends, is an important read for Hastings Library as it considers forming its own access services department.

Yirka, C. A. (2008). What should law libraries stop doing in order to address higher priority initiatives? *AALL Spectrum* 12(9), 28–31. Retrieved from

http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1371773

The author argues for the importance of prioritizing goals and making activity funding decisions based on whether the activities do or do not specifically meet those priorities. Yirka suggests that law school libraries also must align their goals closely with those of the schools they serve, and that librarians need to engage faculty and other stakeholders in open-ended conversations to learn how best to meet their needs.