

## From SWOT to Success: The Collaborative Strategic Planning Journey of an Academic Library Department

Kabel Nathan Stanwicks

### Abstract

This article discusses the benefits of engaging library staff in a department strategic planning process, using the State University of New York at Albany (University at Albany) Libraries' Access Services Department as an example. The author describes the process used to create a department strategic plan, which involved a combination of department meetings, independent and group work, and ongoing communication to maintain staff engagement. The resulting plan connected department goals and initiatives to the strategic plans of the University at Albany and the University Libraries to provide staff members with a better understanding of the importance of their work to the strategic direction of the university. Additionally, the planning process provided staff with a morale boost, and the plan served as a communication tool to articulate the contributions of the department to the university community.

### Introduction

Strategic planning usually takes place at the upper levels of an organization—an entire library, a library system, a library consortium, or a university—and is useful in guiding the direction of an organization. Frontline library staff can feel disconnected from the plan of their organization if they are not adequately engaged in the planning process and plan implementation, or if it is unclear how their daily work ties into the plan. Department strategic planning can provide library staff members with a collaborative, morale-boosting approach to setting department priorities and an improved understanding of how the work of their department supports the strategy of their parent organization. It can also provide a mechanism with which they can communicate their shared priorities with library colleagues and the university community.

Both the University at Albany and its University Libraries developed and implemented strategic plans. However, as the Head of Access Services in the University at Albany Libraries, I believed that my department staff could benefit from engaging in a department strategic planning process. This paper provides an overview of the process that our department used to create a department strategic plan, and it discusses the benefits of engaging department staff in an inclusive, bottom-up, strategic planning process.

## Literature Review

Strategic planning has been defined in a variety of ways and is regularly associated with other terms, including, but not limited to, strategy, strategic management, strategic leadership, strategic thinking, and strategic position—all of which also have varying definitions. Strategy, itself, focuses on sustainably allocating resources to achieve goals that drive the competitive advantage of an organization over an extended period (Chandler 2003; Johnson et al. 2020). Strategic planning, as an extension of strategy, is a process by which an organization aligns with and responds to external factors that relate to or affect its operations; this helps the organization to achieve its goals and develop a competitive advantage within its operational sector (Dabbour and Kott 2017; Harvard Business Review 2019; Leebaw 2019; Sanches 2018; Smith 2021; Feather and Sturges 2003). Strategic planning is typically a cyclical process that involves scanning the environment, identifying organizational mandates, seeking stakeholder input, establishing or updating mission and vision statements, setting and executing goals and priorities in alignment with the mission and vision statements, and evaluating the outcomes of the process (Mintzberg 1994). Strategic planning within the nonprofit sector aims to achieve the social objectives of an organization at a reasonable cost and highlights the unique activities and value of an organization (Smith 2021). Academic library strategic planning employs approaches used by corporations and nonprofits; however, it usually centers on service innovation and how libraries meet the needs of their users, rather than how libraries compete with other organizations (McNicol 2005; Perrin 2017).

There are many approaches to strategic planning, but there is no universally prescribed methodology for strategic planning; therefore, an organization must pick a methodology that meets its unique circumstances or combine methodologies to meet its needs (McNicol 2005; Wayne 2011). Three such methods, or frameworks, are frequently referenced in the academic library strategic planning literature. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is a traditional strategic planning framework, in which an organization examines its internal

strengths and weaknesses, as well as its external opportunities and threats, and determines how to use the strengths and opportunities to counter or mitigate the weaknesses and threats (Bryson 2018; Sanches 2018). SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) is a strategic planning framework steeped in the concept of appreciative inquiry and focuses on positive factors that will generate excitement among those involved in the strategic planning process (Stavros et al. 2007). Scenario planning is another framework that uses clear narratives that allow an organization to examine how different uncertainties may affect its future state by tying trends and uncertainties together to develop patterns that can drive its strategy (Shoemaker 2012). Scenario planning can be used as a standalone framework or stacked with another framework, such as SWOT or SOAR.

Inclusivity is crucial to successful strategic planning, and it is a common theme in the library strategic planning literature. Traditional approaches to strategic planning are often driven by management without the involvement of lower-level staff in the planning process, which can perpetuate workplace inequalities and lead to staff disengagement in the planning process and final product (Casey 2015; Leebaw 2019). Approaches that emphasize collaboration and consultation with library staff at all levels of the organization can build trust in the planning process (Cervone 2014; McNicol 2005), can help staff members develop an understanding of the important changes happening in libraries (Brenner et al. 2017; Perrin 2017; Sanches 2018; Wayne 2011), can facilitate the change management needed to drive the success of an organization (Smith 2021), and can improve staff morale and library services (Brenner et al. 2017; Casey 2015; McNicol 2005; Saunders 2016). Management still needs to be visibly involved in inclusive and collaborative strategic planning efforts to ensure that staff members take the activity seriously (Brown and Gonzalez 2007; Cervone 2014).

Department strategic planning and bottom-up strategic planning (i.e., units develop plans and goals that feed into the strategic plan of their library) provide staff members with an opportunity to participate in the strategic planning process and enable them to understand how their work ties into department or library strategy (Leebaw, 2019; Perrin 2017; Saunders 2016). Leebaw (2019) employs the lens of critical management studies to explore how staff involvement in developing goals from the bottom up can provide an informed and inclusive approach to strategic planning. Perrin (2017) posits that individual units within a library may face unique challenges or situations and, therefore, should develop their own strategic plans, instead of relying solely on a library-wide plan to guide the work of their units.

As academic libraries and higher education traverse a changing landscape, libraries face an increased need to demonstrate their importance and contributions toward realizing the

missions and goals of their universities. Academic libraries must focus on how services, spaces, and collections facilitate student success and help achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the strategic plans of their universities (Edgar 2022; Dillon 2008; McNicol 2005; Saunders 2016). Although libraries cannot support all aspects of the strategic plans of their universities, they need to select and support components of those plans to which they can add value and demonstrate that they play an integral role in advancing their universities (McNicol 2005; Saunders 2016). In addition, Saunders (2016) suggests that a library should clearly note any connections between its strategic plan and the plan of its parent institution to communicate this information unambiguously to stakeholders.

Previous case studies in academic library strategic planning explore unit-level strategic planning, collaborative and inclusive strategic planning, and library strategic plans that support and articulate direct connections to the plans of their universities. Perrin's 2017 case study outlines how the author developed a SWOT analysis and strategic plan for the Digital Resources Unit at the Texas Tech University Library, shared it with unit staff, and used the plan to guide the unit toward establishing a national reputation. Casey (2015) outlines two inclusive strategic planning cycles, which involved both library management and staff, at the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Hunt Library. The first cycle began with each staff member bringing two ideas—one for a new or improved service and one for an outdated function for potential elimination—to a staff-wide retreat, during which library staff worked through activities to develop content for a vision statement and goals. The second cycle used both the SOAR and scenario planning frameworks to develop a strategic plan. Sanches's 2018 case study presents lines of action in the library strategic plan that advance the strategic plan and mission of the university at the Universidade de Lisboa, and Franklin (2009) outlines how the University of Connecticut Libraries created a new strategic plan that was aligned with the academic plan of the university. The case study in this paper is unique for its investigation of a collaborative and inclusive approach to developing a department strategic plan, which aligns with and advances portions of the strategic plan of its library and the strategic plan of its university. The published department strategic plan clearly outlines how it contributes to the realization of the strategic objectives of both the library and the university.

## Institutional Background

The University at Albany is one of the 64 colleges and universities that make up the State University of New York (SUNY) system. The University at Albany was first founded in 1844 as the New York State Normal School; it has undergone several name changes during its

175-year history, and it became a doctoral-granting university in the 1960s. The University at Albany is a Carnegie R1: Doctoral University and is considered one of the four SUNY university centers. It currently is home to more than 16,500 students and more than 1,200 faculty members. The university has two campuses in Albany and a Health Sciences campus in Rensselaer, New York. The University Libraries consists of three centrally managed library facilities. The main library, known as the University Library, and the Science Library are located on the uptown Albany campus, and the Dewey Graduate Library is located on the downtown Albany campus. The University Libraries employ 72.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty and staff members, welcome around 470,000 visitors annually, house more than 2 million print volumes, provide access to a wide range of electronic resources, and contain a variety of physical spaces to meet the varying needs of library users. The University Libraries is a member of the Association of Research Libraries.

The Access Services Department of the Libraries is responsible for a variety of public-facing services and back-of-house operations, such as circulation, interlibrary loan and document delivery, course reserves, and stacks maintenance. The department is headed by a librarian, who is a member of the academic faculty, and the department personnel consists of a mix of professional staff, clerical staff, graduate student employees, and undergraduate college work study students. Department staffing levels have fluctuated over time, and it previously comprised separate work units for each of its service functions. In 2015, the department experienced a wave of retirements, during which many long-term clerical staff members left within months of one another. The department then underwent an internal reorganization, in which the department combined its individual work units into a single work unit, simplified processes, and cross-trained the staff. The Access Services Department continued to experience some natural turnover between 2015 and 2020, and then encountered another wave of retirements and departures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The department had 25 full-time employees and approximately 50 student employees as we worked through our department strategic planning process in 2017–2018, the department absorbed an additional unit with five full-time staff members and six student employees in 2020, and, as of 2023, the department has 18 full-time employees and 30 student employees.

In 2017, The University at Albany completed an inclusive strategic planning process that sought input from and involved students, faculty, staff, community partners, and government leaders. The planning process took two years to complete and produced a five-year plan with broad goals focused on student success, research excellence, diversity and inclusion, internationalization, and community engagement (University at Albany, SUNY, n.d.). As the

university launched its strategic plan, its vice presidents and deans were asked to develop their own strategic plans to demonstrate how their units would realize and support the strategic plan of the university.

The University Libraries developed a strategic plan in early 2018 to support the plan of the university and to help advance the libraries. Access Services Department clerical staff members wanted a more explicit connection between their daily work of delivering library services and the strategic plan of the University Libraries. At that time, the University Libraries consisted of five divisions—public services, collections, finance and administration, technical services and library systems, and the Dewey Graduate Library—and each division director took different approaches when crafting their contributions to the strategic plan of the University Libraries. The resulting plan has five broad goals: supporting research, teaching, and learning; collaboration; library space; organizational culture; and scholarly communication. Each goal has a set of objectives, with action items focused on realizing the goal, and the plan focuses primarily on the work in which our librarians and professional staff are engaged.

## Why We Pursued a Department Strategic Plan

Access Services Department staff members know that their work is important, and they know that students and researchers appreciate the services that the department provides. These staff members chose not to engage in the strategic planning process of the university and they were not invited to participate in the strategic planning process of the libraries. They had a difficult time relating to the strategic plans of both the university and the libraries and felt excluded from both strategic plans because they could not easily see how their day-to-day work supported these plans. My department management team and I wanted to be able to articulate the value of the work of our department and how our work tied into and supported the strategic plans of both the university and libraries. It was clear that it would be beneficial to engage the Access Services staff in a process to develop a separate department strategic plan that we could tie into the goals and objectives of the strategic plans of the libraries and the university.

We needed to collaboratively prioritize our work as a department, which provided another impetus for developing a department strategic plan. We began to see workload and service demand increases following the internal restructuring of the department in 2015. In addition to the work we were already undertaking, many of us felt that there were other tasks that we should be doing, that there were projects that we wanted to undertake, and that there were initiatives on the horizon that we knew would require our time and attention. Also, the

department was being asked to provide additional assistance with facilities oversight, expanded library hours, and building tours.

Everyone in the department realized that we could not address all the outstanding items on our collective task list while simultaneously providing high-quality service to library users; however, we lacked consensus on the service, task, and project priorities of the department. Some staff members felt that the interlibrary loan service should be our top priority because it is highly regarded by the university community; others thought that we should focus on collection maintenance tasks so library users and staff could easily find materials in the collections; and others believed that we needed to enhance our student employment operation to maintain library hours and services. Our department structure had changed, the way that we conducted business was changing, and we needed to get everyone in the department on the same page. It was increasingly clear that we needed a plan. We needed something to remind us about our priorities, guide conversations about the forward trajectory of our department, communicate how we are prioritizing staff time, and help us advocate for additional resources.

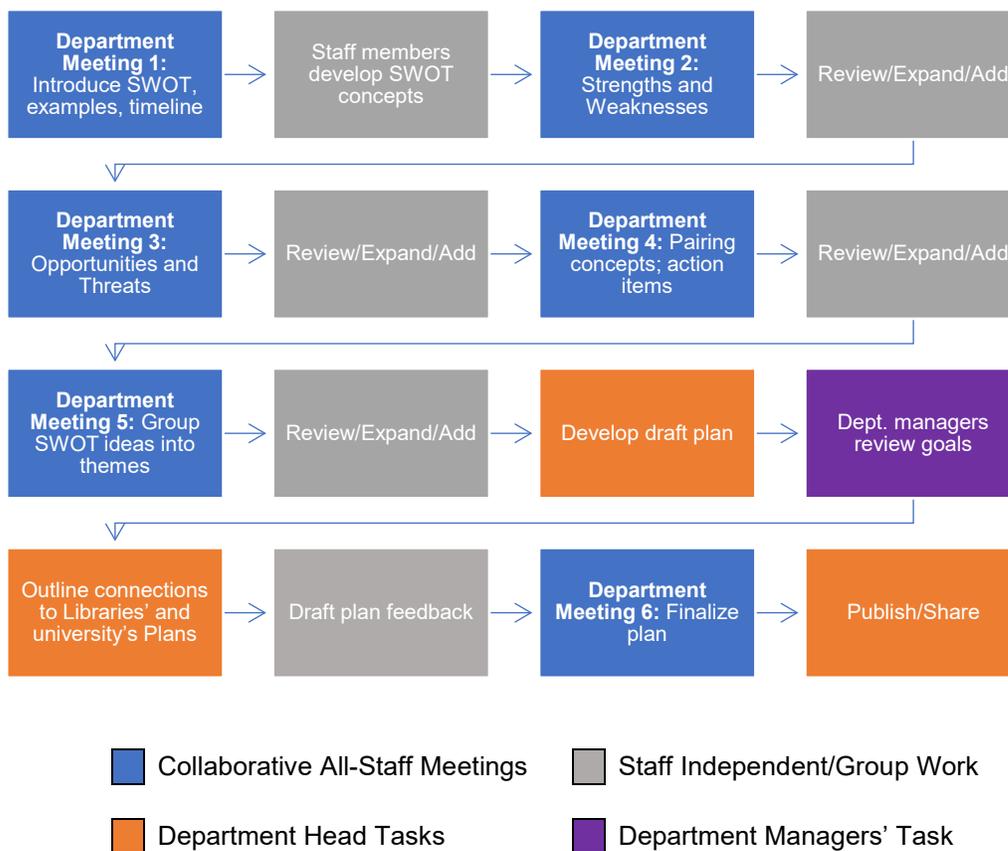
## Our Strategic Planning Process

Advance preparation, coupled with ongoing communication to maintain the engagement of staff, helped the process progress smoothly. I had individual conversations with Access Services staff members before our first strategic planning meeting. This provided me with an opportunity to gain an understanding of staff members' previous experiences with, and attitudes toward, strategic planning. Staff members' negative thoughts about past strategic planning experiences centered primarily around three issues: exclusion from the process or the plan, participation in a process that did not lead to a plan, and the development of a plan that was not executed. This knowledge helped me shape communication with staff members and encourage shared accountability around both the process and the execution of the plan. I outlined the process and its timeline at the outset and communicated adjustments as we progressed through the process. This ensured that everyone understood why we were engaging in a strategic planning exercise, how we were approaching the process, and what we were trying to accomplish.

I decided to use a SWOT analysis to approach our strategic planning because most staff members already were familiar with that framework. For the purposes of our SWOT analysis, we defined strengths as things we are doing well, weaknesses as things we need to do better, opportunities as anything advantageous to our department, and threats as anything that can negatively affect our operation. The department used a collaborative process that unfolded over

the course of six department planning meetings and included a combination of independent and group work between each meeting (Figure 1). During our first department meeting, I introduced the strategic planning process, provided an overview of the SWOT framework, discussed our timeline for the planning process, and shared strategic plan examples. After the meeting, staff members worked independently or in groups, depending upon their preferences, to generate ideas for our SWOT inventory. I posed leading questions for each SWOT area to stimulate brainstorming and conversation (Figure 2).

During our second department meeting staff members worked collaboratively to generate lists of strengths and weaknesses, and, during our third department meeting, did so with lists of opportunities and threats. We recorded our SWOT concepts on white boards during these two meetings. After these two meetings, I photographed the white boards, transcribed their content, and shared the photographs and transcriptions with the entire department. Staff members were encouraged to review this content, expand on the ideas that we discussed, add new concepts to our SWOT inventory, and provide feedback on the process.



**Figure 1. Access Services Department Strategic Planning Process**

<b>Strengths</b>	What are our strongest contributions to the university community?
	What do we do that no one else does?
	What do users like best about our services?
<b>Weaknesses</b>	How or where are we lacking resources?
	What do we need to improve?
	What do users want us to do better?
<b>Opportunities</b>	What could we do better if we had additional resources?
	What things outside our organization might be advantageous to us?
	What can we build from our strengths?
<b>Threats</b>	What is happening outside our organization that could negatively affect us?
	Does someone else provide similar services with greater ease for our users?
	What weaknesses leave us vulnerable?

**Figure 2. SWOT Leading Questions**

The department collaboratively established ground rules for meetings to encourage staff to share ideas, foster collaboration, and create a safe space for all to contribute. Our rules were simple: one person speaks at a time, no interrupting, all ideas are welcome, and staff must not critique or judge the contributions of others. It is important that participants feel that their contributions are heard and that their ideas are valued, but they must also understand that it is not possible to incorporate every idea into the final plan. When we began our process, we discussed how to manage concepts that would not make our strategic plan’s final cut. The department agreed that we would add these ideas to our running list of small projects that we always maintain, so staff members can tackle them as time permits or when staff members need additional tasks to perform. Staff members appreciate the variety that these small projects inject into their day-to-day work.

Some of the **strengths** that staff members identified included request services (i.e., interlibrary loan, paging, document delivery), the adaptability and flexibility of staff, textbooks on physical course reserve, department staff training guides, and the department procedural documentation. Examples of **weaknesses** that staff members noted included service offerings to students on the Health Sciences Campus in Rensselaer; our reliance on multiple, disconnected systems to provide services; and our outdated billing policies and procedures. Staff members suggested **opportunities** that included chipping collections with radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags, purging expired patron records and closed transaction histories in our

circulation system, and leveraging collection-sharing with other SUNY libraries. Staff members perceived **threats** that included multiple system migrations affecting our department, increasing copyright costs for interlibrary loan transactions, and the budget of our university.

We used our fourth department meeting as a brainstorming session to develop a list of potential goals for our strategic plan. Staff members were asked to use our SWOT inventory to answer the following four questions to prepare for this brainstorming session:

- What known projects, tasks, or initiatives are on the horizon and will require the involvement of our staff members?
- How can we leverage the strengths that we identified to address perceived weaknesses or threats?
- Which opportunities can we leverage to mitigate threats or offset weaknesses?
- Are there any SWOT concepts that stand out as issues we should address—or things we should embrace—in their own right?

Some of the concepts developed during this brainstorming session included:

- Pursue collaborations with public libraries. Promote our services and collections to local public libraries and promote to University at Albany students the collections and services of local public libraries.
- Upgrade the public address system in the main library with a new system that includes the ability to schedule pre-recorded announcements.
- Develop an online form and workflow for circulation fine appeals.
- Assess silent, quiet, and collaborative noise zones in the uptown campus libraries; adjust zones based on how students are using spaces.
- Collaborate with the university bookstore to obtain course textbook lists and proactively place books owned by the libraries on reserve.
- Work with subject librarians to purchase frequently requested items for course reserves.
- Purge old integrated library system records (e.g., expired patron records, closed transaction records, withdrawn equipment item records) to speed up circulation transactions and improve patron privacy.
- Streamline lengthy circulation transactions (e.g., laptop loans, camera loans) with electronic forms and workflows.
- Develop consistent loan periods for similar material types.

- Revise and enhance the department’s procedural documentation to develop consistent training and customer service approaches.

On their own, staff members then reflected on the actionable goals we drafted, generated additional goals, and expanded on the ideas discussed in our brainstorming session. Also, they looked for similarities among the goals that we developed and thought about thematic labels for these similar goals.

During our fifth strategic planning meeting, we worked on grouping the actionable goals, developed strategic themes around these groupings, decided which goals to advance to our strategic plan, and determined which ideas to place in our department project list. The broad categories that staff brought to the strategic planning meeting, and around which the department achieved consensus, focused on documentation and training, our student employment operation, patron services, enterprise technology, and circulation billing.

We worked collaboratively to explore in detail the concepts within these categories, and we transformed them into the five themes for our strategic plan (Figure 3). We reviewed the goals listed under each theme and selected those goals that we thought would place our department on a forward trajectory; we branded these as “strategic action items” and moved them forward to our draft strategic plan. The department managers completed a final review of the themes and action items with the intent of ensuring that all strategic action items be framed as SMART goals (i.e., specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). During this final review, it was determined that one of the strategic action items (develop a culture committed to providing high-quality customer service to users in-person and remotely) did not qualify as a SMART goal. Therefore, it was brought back to the department, which determined that the idea was important enough to retain in our strategic plan, so it was rebranded as an additional theme (Figure 3), with its own set of actionable items.

Finally, the department head and department managers looked at each strategic action item in relation to the strategic plans of the University Libraries and the University at Albany to determine how the strategic plan of the department supported those of its parent organizations. Notations were added to the strategic plan of the department to explicitly show connections between the strategic action items of the department and the strategic plans of the parent organizations to demonstrate how the work of the department would support both the university and the libraries. The draft strategic plan of the department was presented to the entire Access Services Department for review, and the department met for a final planning meeting to discuss

the draft, make final edits, and adopt the final plan. We posted our final plan (Appendix A) to our department wiki page, and I shared the plan with our division director and the other department heads in the University Libraries.

Initial Themes
Enhance patron services to better meet users' needs.
Develop quality documentation and training to improve service quality, better empower staff, and decrease training time for new staff members and student employees.
Reevaluate department student employment and supervision policies and practices and implement new approaches.
Address issues related to enterprise system migrations and the future of enterprise systems.
Streamline circulation billing practices to facilitate patron payments, billing management, and system migration.
Additional Theme
Develop a culture committed to providing high-quality customer service to users, in-person and remotely.

**Figure 3. Strategic Plan Themes**

## Our Strategic Plan

In our strategic plan, we have outlined several key themes that will drive our efforts to enhance patron services, enhance student employee performance, address technical infrastructure, update policies, and prioritize staff development. The first theme in our strategic plan focuses on enhancing patron services through increased marketing efforts, refining service delivery models, expanding access to resources, and improving the usability of our physical collections. The second theme seeks to increase staff members' proficiency and comfort levels with the wide variety of duties they are responsible for executing by improving the procedural documentation of the department and developing consistent training for new staff members and student employees. The third theme addresses the improvement of student employee performance and the development of increased comfort levels among full-time staff members in relation to their work with student employees. The fourth theme of our strategic plan addresses information technology infrastructure changes (i.e., the SUNY system-wide migration to the Alma library services platform, a major upgrade to our electronic reserves system, a potential migration to the Tipasa interlibrary loan platform) that the department needed to address. The fifth theme seeks to modernize the libraries' circulation billing practices, policies, and procedures. Our sixth and final theme concentrates on staff development to enhance the library user experience.

After we finalized our strategic plan, I worked with the Access Services Department managers to select which parts of the plan we would begin working on immediately, and we developed a tentative sequencing for the remaining goals of our plan. We created project plans and began work on our first set of goals, and we regularly schedule time in our department meetings to discuss the progress being made to achieve our goals and realize our strategic plan. I refer to our strategic plan frequently with department staff to make sure our plan remains visible and continues to be seen as a relevant document. These approaches demonstrate that I am committed to using the plan that we all invested so much time and effort in developing.

The department benefited significantly by engaging in a strategic planning process and investing in the product we developed. Staff members had the opportunity to participate in charting their destinies—they can see themselves, and their work, in our plan—this provided staff with a huge morale boost. We have hired additional staff members since implementing our strategic plan, in part because our plan has helped us articulate how potential new employees can support the university's strategic goals for student success and research excellence. When we bring applicants to campus for interviews, I point to the strategic plan of our department to describe how the positions for which they applied will advance the department, the libraries, and the university.

Our department strategic plan has proven to be a great communication tool. It helps us explain what our department does and the importance of our work to the university community, and it has been particularly valuable when communicating with upper management. I refer to the content of our plan in conversations with my division director when discussing projects my department is undertaking and the impact our work has throughout the university community. The University Libraries faculty and staff were asked to provide our new university provost with an overview of the libraries' initiatives, and my department's strategic plan was a useful resource for crafting a brief presentation for the provost about the Access Services Department. In the summer of 2022, we welcomed an interim dean of libraries to the University at Albany, and division directors and department heads were asked to provide the interim dean with a list of strategic initiatives on which we were working. Again, I referred to the strategic plan of my department to provide our new interim dean with an overview of our current and future initiatives.

## Lessons Learned

A significant amount of advance planning was invested in this process—from conversations with staff members about their attitudes toward strategic planning to developing

leading questions to facilitate brainstorming around each area of the SWOT. However, I was not able to anticipate all the issues that we would encounter. I was able to generate initial excitement among staff around the idea of a department strategic plan, but we failed to adhere to our timeline when our process stalled early on. Despite being excited by the opportunity to develop a long-term strategy for the department, some staff members were shy when it came to participating in early brainstorming sessions. At times I found it difficult to fully participate in the process while simultaneously facilitating the process, and I was initially perplexed by how to handle some of the contributions to our SWOT inventory. I encourage anyone pursuing a similar process to be flexible, be prepared to improvise when encountering the unexpected, and be honest and communicative with everyone involved in the process.

I outlined an aggressive timeline at the start of this process; unfortunately, we were not able to adhere to that timeline. Other pressing issues—such as projects assigned from administration, unexpected staff vacancies, and professional service commitments—came up during the early stages of this process and required me to postpone work on our department strategic plan. Staff members initially questioned these process delays. However, communicating changes in the timeline and providing an explanation as to why the timeline shifted was helpful and ensured that I maintained the trust of staff members throughout the process. We could have benefitted from a slightly protracted timeline that spaced out the various process milestones. This would have accounted for the unpredictable workload shifts that the department regularly experiences.

Staff members were initially asked to work independently to develop ideas to bring to our brainstorming sessions and strategic planning meetings. However, some staff members were uncomfortable with this request and were reluctant to share ideas. They were nervous about how their ideas would be perceived by colleagues, and they were quiet at the beginning of the process, even though we set ground rules to foster inclusion and collaboration. Upon observing the discomfort that some staff members were experiencing, we pivoted our methods and encouraged staff members to work in small groups if they felt more comfortable working with others. This flexibility allowed staff members to test their ideas in smaller groups, in which they felt safe, before sharing ideas with the larger group. This provided these staff members with a boost in confidence, and I found that they were active contributors to the process in subsequent meetings. This was intended to be a collaborative process, but I could have included staff members in designing the methods and approach we used for our strategic planning process or sought broader feedback on methods before beginning the SWOT inventory. Doing so could

have helped to avoid the initial discomfort experienced by some staff members and would have generated a more inclusive process from start to finish.

I had to be mindful of both the real and perceived power dynamics in relation to my roles as department head, strategic planning facilitator, and strategic planning participant. I felt strongly that I should be a visible part of the process as a manager; however, at times this made it difficult to be an active contributor because I did not want to give the impression that my ideas should carry more weight or give the impression that I wanted to drive the conversation in a particular direction. During our meetings, I shared thoughts that aligned with contributions from other staff members; I added other ideas to our SWOT during the period set aside after each meeting to reflect on the concepts captured on our white boards, expand on these ideas, and provide additional ideas. I believe I would have felt more comfortable and able to fully participate if we had brought in an outside facilitator to assist with this process.

Staff members contributed several ideas related to services and things that fell outside the purview and control of our department, and for which we could not realize change. These mainly related to services that were hosted in, but not governed by, the libraries, and with which our staff members assisted patrons (e.g., public printing, ID card services, vending machines). I did not anticipate these contributions, nor was I initially prepared for how to handle them. I did not want to stymie the brainstorming process or contradict the notion that all ideas were welcome, so I recorded these ideas on the white boards and took time to reflect on how to manage these contributions. After we completed our SWOT inventory, I asked the department for input on how we should handle these SWOT ideas. We decided as a group that I would share concepts that fell outside the purview of our department with those who had control over the services associated with these ideas.

## Conclusion

The Access Services Department has started preliminary conversations about our next round of strategic planning as we work through the final goals in our current department strategic plan. We will commence our next strategic planning process by recapping the successes realized through the implementation of our current strategic plan, with the hope that highlighting and celebrating our successes will develop forward momentum for the next planning cycle. Also, we will review our 2018 SWOT inventory to determine if any concepts still are relevant and should be carried forward into our subsequent planning cycle. The process we used to develop our current strategic plan was internally focused, in the sense that only department staff members contributed to the SWOT inventory, the goals, and the plan. I would

like to expand our approach to include our student employees in our next cycle because they play an important role in the operations of our department, and I believe that they will provide valuable feedback and ideas in this process. I also want to create opportunities for external input in our next planning cycle by surveying library staff outside of our department and seeking input from library users. Our next plan also should include metrics for each goal to help us better measure and quantify the success of our strategic plan. Some of the literature reviewed for this article mentioned the potential benefits of aggregating department- or unit-level goals or strategic plans to generate content for a library-wide strategic plan (Casey 2015; Dabbour and Kott 2017; Saunders 2016); this idea merits additional exploration within academic libraries. Stakeholder feedback is cited as an important input in the strategic planning process (Brown and Gonzalez 2007; Cervone 2014; Dabbour and Kott 2017). Although the inclusion of such input is extremely valuable in a planning process, it should not impede the development of a department strategic plan. The case study presented in this paper, as well as those presented in Casey (2015) and Perrin (2017), demonstrate that it is possible to develop an effective initial plan employing only an internally focused process.

Libraries are rapidly changing organizations; therefore, strategy needs to be considered at all levels within a library organization. Staff members are better able to support the mission and goals of their library when they understand their organization's strategy and how their work contributes to it. Involving library staff in collaborative, department strategic planning processes can bring unique perspectives and insights to the table, foster a sense of ownership of the plan, and generate a commitment to work to develop the final plan. This also has the potential to increase the motivation and engagement of staff members in other aspects of their work. Good library department strategic planning can encourage collaboration and innovation, promote a shared understanding of goals and priorities at various organizational levels, and foster a culture dedicated to strategic thinking.

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## Appendix A: Access Services Department Strategic Plan 2018–2024

<b>Goal 1: Enhance patron services to better meet users' needs.</b>	
1A	Migrate and centralize patron forms online; convert print forms to web forms and redesign associated workflows, as needed. <sup>5,9</sup>
1B	Improve ILLiad patron interface and ILLiad communication with patrons using email notifications and IDS Logic; identify repeat requests for re-delivery (articles) or purchase on demand (monographs). <sup>1A,1B,2,6</sup>
1C	Promote paging and delivery services. <sup>1A,6</sup>
1D	Promote textbook reserve services (i.e., instructor personal copies on reserve) to instructors to facilitate student access to textbooks. <sup>1A,1B,6</sup>
1E	Enhance library materials access for School of Public Health (SPH) graduate students; provide home delivery service to SPH graduate students; install book return bin on SPH campus and collaborate with SPH dean's office on material returns. <sup>1A,2,6,7</sup>
1F	Examine current practices for SUNY Card deposit machines, recommend improvements, and implement changes, as needed. <sup>7</sup>
1G	Complete collection shifts and collection space assessments to improve collection usability and inform space planning decisions. <sup>4,8</sup>
1H	Complete comprehensive collection inventory to improve the accuracy of our libraries' holdings in discovery interfaces. <sup>1A,2</sup>
<b>Goal 2: Develop quality documentation and training to improve service quality, better empower staff, and decrease on-boarding time for new staff members and student employees.</b>	
2A	Revise existing documentation and create new documentation for services, tasks, workflows, policies, and procedures. <sup>10</sup>
2B	Design interface for online policy/procedure manual to store documentation; populate with documentation. <sup>10</sup>
2C	Review and revise staff training plan; develop student employee training plan. <sup>10</sup>
2D	Design and deploy training modules aligned with training plan: use documentation; develop exercises, tracking, and assessment. <sup>5,10</sup>
2E	Create documents for staff to use for consistent approach to student training. <sup>5,10</sup>
<b>Goal 3: Re-evaluate department student employment and supervision policies and practices; implement new approaches.</b>	
3A	Review and modify/supplement existing employment policies; develop a student employee handbook.
3B	Document the hiring process and work with library budget officer to update portions of the process. <sup>5</sup>
3C	Improve student employee attendance through consistent follow-up and tracking; update attendance policy.

<b>Goal 4: Address issues related to enterprise system migrations and the future of enterprise systems.</b>	
<b><i>Aleph to Alma Migration</i></b>	
4A	Clean up data to facilitate the move to Alma (IPS, Sublibrary, Collection Code, expired patron records, old billing data).
4B	Redesign department workflows for Alma. <sup>5</sup>
4C	Investigate using Primo with Alma as the primary user interface for resource sharing. <sup>5</sup>
4D	Migrate from ILLiad circulation interface to Alma Fulfillment interface. <sup>5</sup>
4E	Enhance collection sharing between SUNY schools and other resource sharing partners. <sup>7</sup>
4F	Prioritize staff training: schedule time for staff to learn and practice using the new system; develop training strategies to facilitate continued service delivery following migration. <sup>11</sup>
<b><i>Ares Electronic Reserves</i></b>	
4G	Upgrade the Ares system to maintain vendor support. <sup>1A,1B</sup>
4H	Assess options and continued need for providing electronic reserves services to the campus community; develop services to meet users' needs. <sup>5,6,9</sup>
<b><i>ILLiad to Tipasa Migration</i></b>	
4I	Work with regional and national resource sharing partners to advocate for needed functionality in the Tipasa system and to develop workarounds to address system shortcomings, as needed. <sup>7</sup>
4J	Provide staff training in the new system. <sup>11</sup>
<b>Goal 5: Streamline circulation billing practices to facilitate patron payments, billing management, and system migration.</b>	
5A	Revise fine/fee structures, write off old Aleph debt in preparation for Alma migration, and design user-focused fine/fee structures. <sup>5,6</sup>
5B	Streamline the fine appeals process to make the process more efficient for users and staff. <sup>5</sup>
5C	Clean up legacy financial files to facilitate billing management; write off old, delinquent, non-collectable debt; purge old paper billing files. <sup>5</sup>
5D	Migrate billing from Integrated Library System/Library Service Platform to PeopleSoft E-Pay to facilitate payment and increase collection rates; automate data transfers between systems. <sup>6</sup>
<b>Goal 6: Develop a culture committed to providing high-quality customer service to users in-person and remotely.</b>	
6A	Develop annual training themes for department; identify online training content with the potential to enhance staff members' customer service skills (e.g., library customer service, communication, emotional intelligence, diversity and inclusion). <sup>11</sup>
6B	License training content annually; develop timelines for staff members to complete modules; hold collaborative discussions around training content and how it applies to department's work; develop and implement concepts for integrating training content into individual staff duties. <sup>11</sup>
<b>Notes in reference to strategic plans of parent organizations</b>	
<b>Supports University at Albany strategic plan</b>	
1A	Student Success: Enhance the student experience (collaborative support services).
1B	Student Success: Enhance the student experience (promote learning).

2	Research Excellence: Enhance research infrastructure.
3	Diversity and Inclusion: Recruit [student] staff who better reflect the strong multidimensional diversity of our undergraduate students.

<b>Supports University Libraries strategic plan</b>	
4	Provide excellent services and collections to support research, teaching, and learning to a diverse campus community: Provide collections that evolve with the changing information environment and align with university curricular and research needs.
5	Provide excellent services and collections to support research, teaching, and learning to a diverse campus community: Engage in current and appropriate assessment of services, outreach, collections, and workflows.
6	Provide excellent services and collections to support research, teaching, and learning to a diverse campus community: Develop, promote, and provide innovative services.
7	Foster collaboration within the libraries, with other university departments/units, with SUNY campuses, and internationally: Increase efficiencies by collaborating within the University Libraries, with other university departments, and SUNY institutions.
8	Invest in physical and virtual library spaces that are inclusive and welcoming: Provide flexible, attractive, safe, energy efficient, and accessible space for teaching, learning, collaboration, and research that address the diverse needs of the campus community.
9	Invest in physical and virtual library spaces that are inclusive and welcoming: Provide virtual library environments to optimize content delivery for a wide range of platforms and to ensure accessibility for all users.
10	Promote an organizational culture that helps libraries faculty and staff succeed in a changing environment, embracing broader engagement with the University at Albany community and academia.
11	Promote an organizational culture that helps libraries faculty and staff succeed in a changing environment, embracing broader engagement with the University at Albany community and academia: Provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.

**Kabel Nathan Stanwicks** ([kstanwicks@albany.edu](mailto:kstanwicks@albany.edu)) is Senior Assistant Librarian and Director of the Division of Collections and Discovery at University at Albany, SUNY.

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