

Using Cross-Functional Teams to Break Down Silos in an Academic Library

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Abstract

Academic libraries are often organized into discrete departments that have little to no interaction. This article describes how one mid-sized academic library used cross-functional teams, grounded in the *Design Thinking for Libraries* toolkit, to encourage staff to collaborate in new ways and cultivate leadership and project management skills among employees without formal supervisory roles. The teams were charged with projects that fell outside existing departmental boundaries, enabling progress on essential infrastructural needs while expanding staff participation and ownership. The initiative improved interaction across departments, strengthened morale, and enhanced employees' competencies. At the same time, outcomes varied across teams, revealing lessons about the importance of clearly defined scope, appropriate authority, and sustained administrative support. This case study demonstrates both the potential and the limitations of cross-functional teams as a strategy for addressing persistent organizational silos and offers insights that may be transferable to other academic libraries.

Introduction

Academic libraries are constantly adapting to evolving user needs, new types of resources, and new technology. As a result, library leadership also needs to adapt by shifting strategies and reorganizing personnel to address modified priorities. These changes, however, can leave important, ongoing tasks without direct ownership. To address these challenges, from 2017 to 2020, the dean of Evans Library at the Florida Institute of Technology implemented cross-functional teams to accomplish neglected projects, encourage employee development, and serve as a team-building activity to raise morale. Grounded in the design thinking framework, this initiative aimed to foster collaboration and innovation across departmental lines.

Like most libraries, Evans Library was organized into distinct departments based on position responsibilities and staff or faculty status. The library faculty consisted of 14 librarians, each with individual job responsibilities, while an additional 16 staff members also held distinct roles. Both

librarians and staff reported to either the assistant dean of User Experience or the assistant dean of Access & Discovery. Within this organizational structure, there was often minimal interdepartmental interaction.

The creation of cross-functional teams integrated the departments, allowing faculty and staff to collaborate on projects outside their usual job descriptions. The teams were designed not only to tackle specific projects but also to continuously revise and refine their charges as part of an ongoing process. This case study examines how cross-functional teams transformed organizational culture, enhanced staff engagement, and addressed strategic priorities within Evans Library. The benefits, outcomes, and lessons learned from this approach are the subjects of this paper.

Literature Review

Library Organization Silos

Organizational silos, a common feature in higher education, are often described as representing “highly specialized knowledge and practices within highly trained groups of professionals” (Diamond et al. 2002). While research has explored both the formation and dismantling of silos, and their potential benefits (De Waal et al. 2019), their overall impact is generally viewed negatively. Silberman et al. (2022) suggest that silos may emerge from a natural tendency to simplify organizational complexity by grouping similar work. In libraries, this tendency manifests as departments organized by expertise, such as acquisitions, public services, and cataloging, or as divisions between frontline and back-of-house teams that rarely interact. Kowalski (2017) argues that such departmental silos hinder communication, lower staff morale, and decrease efficiency and productivity. Similarly, Koch and Fortkord (2024) note that without effective communication, the successful implementation of change processes is limited.

Silos can also foster competition for resources or recognition, with individuals perceiving their department as more valuable than others (Diamond et al. 2002). This dynamic can impede the library’s overall function and its integration within the broader institution. For organizations to be effective, participants should share a common mission, vision, and goals. Yet, as Breen et al. (2025) conclude, silos often create structural barriers to operational success. Addressing the impact of silos requires more than just increasing physical proximity. Diamond et al. (2002) define silos as “styles of human relationships” that exist not only within organizational structures but also within employees’ minds. Individuals construct “mental silos” based on perceived boundaries of knowledge and technical expertise, often referred to as “staying in my lane.”

Therefore, dismantling silos requires addressing both structural and psychological barriers. Structural silos reflect organizational or cultural barriers within an institution, while psychological silos can inhibit individual engagement within the organization (Cilliers and Greyvenstein 2012).

Cross-Functional Teams

Utilizing cross-functional teams to collaborate on projects offers a practical strategy for dismantling both structural and psychological barriers within organizations. A cross-functional team is one that brings people together from different work areas with different skill sets to collaborate on a defined project (Parker 1994). By increasing interaction and familiarity among employees who do not typically work together, these teams help dissolve the mental and skill-based silos. Such collaboration often reveals intersections between areas of expertise, leading to fresh perspectives and creative solutions. Cross-departmental teamwork also inspires collaborative and sustainable leadership (Odiase and Agbadudu 2024).

Assembling individuals with the requisite skills into a focused team is one strategy to facilitate the execution of a project. Otherwise, a project can stall or lose momentum as it moves slowly through departmental channels or doesn't move at all (Kay 2023). When functioning well, cross-functional teams are self-managing. However, success depends on clearly defined goals and an understanding of how team responsibilities align with departmental priorities (Kay 2023). Perrin and Daniel (2017) also emphasize the importance of a clear goal and communication among team members, but in their study of a web development cross-functional team, they discovered that cross-functional teams are not always the most effective solution for achieving a goal. As a result, they changed strategies and found that a centralized leadership structure with an advisory committee offered significant advantages over the cross-functional team.

Design Thinking in Libraries

Design thinking is a user-centered approach to problem solving that emphasizes empathy, creative ideation, prototyping solutions, and iterative testing. In academic libraries, this iterative methodology has been explored to some success (Allison and Palilonis 2024; Bartlett 2018; Clarke et al. 2020; Fosmire 2016; Ippoliti 2016; Luca and Bhuvu 2016; Luca and Ulyannikova 2020; Whang et al. 2017). By encouraging librarians to step into the mindsets of their users, design thinking empowers librarians to develop services, spaces, and programs that align with user needs, fostering innovation and encouraging active staff participation. Design thinking allows libraries to move beyond traditional assumptions and create more relevant and impactful offerings for their communities (Association of College and Research Libraries n.d.; Meier and

Miller 2016; Clarke et al. 2020). This framework can prove exceptionally useful in reimagining information literacy instruction, refining service design, and redesigning physical library spaces (Bartlett 2018). By embracing design thinking strategically, academic libraries can align their offerings with broader institutional goals and the dynamic needs of their patrons, thereby reinforcing their continued relevance and value within the evolving higher education landscape (Allison and Palilonis 2024; Association of College and Research Libraries 2018).

Design thinking gained momentum in the library world through a collaboration between IDEO, the Chicago Public Library, and Aarhus Public Libraries. This partnership explored how the methodology could be applied to develop new services that address diverse user needs. The outcome of this collaboration was the 2015 *Design Thinking for Libraries* toolkit, which includes a detailed guide, an activities workbook, and a quick-reference guide (IDEO 2015).

Although the toolkit has been influential, there is limited research on how the design thinking concepts have translated into measurable outcomes in academic libraries. Nonetheless, scholars have highlighted its potential. Meier and Miller (2016) suggested design thinking as a way for libraries to hasten innovation, and articles by Bell (2008, 2011, 2018) also emphasized its value for academic libraries. Among its benefits, design thinking encourages empathy with users, generates a wide range of ideas, and fosters cross-staff collaboration by flattening hierarchies (Clarke et al. 2020). Some of the most successful applications have emerged in service-oriented contexts, where empathizing with users has led to innovative approaches to meeting their needs (Fosmire 2016; Ippoliti 2016; Whang et al. 2017). Additionally, a growing body of literature on library service design (Marquez and Downey 2015; Johnson et al. 2015) shares many similarities with design thinking, particularly its focus on the overall user experience.

While design thinking has been lauded for its ability to foster creativity and innovation, scholars caution that its application in libraries also has challenges. First, design thinking exercises can be time- and labor-intensive, raising concerns about sustainability when added to already heavy workloads (Whang et al. 2017). Second, although the method excels at generating ideas, libraries often struggle to transition from ideation to implementation, creating prototypes or conducting iterative testing (Allison and Palilonis 2024; Clarke et al. 2020). Finally, cultural resistance may limit its impact, as staff members accustomed to traditional organizational structures may be reluctant to embrace ambiguous or experimental approaches (Marquez and Downey 2015).

These strengths and weaknesses suggest that design thinking in libraries is most effective when supported by administrative buy-in, dedicated time, and a culture open to

experimentation. In our case, we sought to balance these dynamics by embedding prototype creation and iteration into the cross-functional team charges while also acknowledging the challenges of applying design thinking principles to services such as staff training or policy review.

Strategic Planning Using Design Thinking

The design thinking success stories inspired us to use the framework to address and elevate areas of the library needing attention during our 2017 Strategic Planning Retreat and planning sessions. Prior to the retreat, library leadership identified areas of strategic importance and appointed a lead for each group. Several planning sessions were held before the retreat to clarify each leader's role and familiarize them with the design thinking process and exercises. Each of the five groups consisted of five or six individuals, intentionally selected as part of the strategic planning process. Friends and colleagues who worked closely together were placed in separate groups to encourage broader idea development and minimize potential groupthink.

Utilizing the *Design Thinking in a Day* toolkit (IDEO 2015), each group was assigned a pre-identified library challenge to explore and research for inspiration. In keeping with design thinking philosophy, the ideation phase, or brainstorming, encourages participants to freely suggest ideas, regardless of how unconventional, without engaging in discussion or critique. After generating ideas, each group selected one concept to prototype using basic crafting supplies. During the final session of the day, groups presented their prototype to all participants and received constructive feedback.

Although a single day is not enough time to solve complex library challenges, the teams were highly engaged and enthusiastically presented their solutions. One memorable prototype featured a zipline across campus to transport students quickly from the seven-story Crawford building (known for its notoriously slow elevator) directly to the library. Although the zipline was clearly not feasible, it exemplified the purpose of the ideation phase: to encourage imaginative thinking without constraints. More importantly, the animated participation of all group members demonstrated that the strategically formed collaborative teams were a success. Following a leadership debriefing after the retreat, the concept of using cross-functional teams was further developed and implemented to accomplish strategic goals for the upcoming year.

Implementation of Cross-Functional Teams

As the structure of these cross-functional groups evolved, deliberate attention was given to the terminology used to define them. This linguistic choice reflected a strategic effort to influence team dynamics and shape organizational culture. The decision to refer to these groups as *teams* rather than *committees* was intended to foster a collaborative and innovative mindset rather than one with bureaucratic connotations. The term *team* emphasizes shared responsibility and the expectation of active contribution from all members. Informed by the design thinking strategic planning retreat, the dean and assistant deans did not directly participate in the teams, specifically to allow for idea and solution generation to occur in a collaborative environment, rather than default to a top-down decision-making model.

Team Size

To optimize productivity and foster a collaborative environment, each team was limited to five or six members. As Parker (1994) observes, small teams offer distinct advantages, including increased productivity, accountability, participation, and trust. These qualities tend to decrease as team size increases. Small teams also allowed the groups to operate collegially. Leadership skills emerged organically as members worked through stumbling blocks. As a result, participation was equitable, and team members felt a shared sense of ownership and accountability to their group and its charge. Notably, one group renamed themselves from the Social Engagement Team to the Culture Club early on, believing the name better reflected their goals.

Team Structure

Each cross-functional team was intentionally composed to leverage complementary skill sets and promote diverse thinking. To encourage contributions beyond traditional role boundaries, department heads were asked to recommend team members based on their unique strengths and perspectives. This strategic approach ensured a range of viewpoints while also maintaining alignment with each individual's position within the library. For example, the head of instruction and the online learning librarian were both assigned to the video tutorial team, as both positions supported the goal of keeping the online videos current. Additional factors influencing team assignments included individuals' personalities, backgrounds, and areas of interest—both professional and personal.

Each team also included a mix of both faculty and staff members to help bridge the “librarian-staff divide,” a known contributor to negatively affecting library employee morale (Glusker et al. 2022). Accommodating the different work schedules of faculty and staff required

thoughtful planning of meeting times to ensure full participation and equitable consideration of each member.

Team Purpose

In alignment with the library's strategic planning goals, each team was created to fulfill a specific institutional purpose, reflected in the team's name. These included the following:

- Social Engagement
- Professional Development
- Shared Drive Maintenance
- Video Tutorial Review
- Website Improvement
- Policy Review
- LibGuide Review

As Glusker et al. (2022) noted, two key components of maintaining high employee morale are social interaction and professional development. To directly address these needs, the Social Engagement and the Professional Development teams were formed.

Other teams were established to tackle projects that didn't fall under the responsibility of any single department. These were the Shared File Organization and Website Improvement teams. Similarly, the Policy Review, LibGuide Review, and Video Tutorial Review teams were created to ensure ongoing maintenance and relevance of these resources.

Team Leadership

Cross-functional teams require a distinct leadership approach. "Team leads" were selected at the outset of implementation based on their relevant skills, strengths, and potential to guide discussions and facilitate meetings effectively. As Parker (1994) emphasizes, empowering a team leader is essential, but it must be done without creating a dynamic where members feel subordinate. Instead, the leader's role is to set clear goals and help the team stay focused on achieving them (Parker 1994).

In the absence of a rigid hierarchy, communication remained collegial, and course corrections were welcomed. Learning was lateral, with team members acquiring new skills from one another. For some leads, this was their first experience using administrative tools such as scheduling software and room reservation systems.

To encourage early successes for new or inexperienced leaders, basic charges and goals were provided to each team to clarify expectations. These are discussed in the following section. The dean and assistant deans also mentored team leaders in communication, flexibility,

conflict resolution, and other skills essential to effective cross-functional team leadership (Parker 1994). The goal was to help team leads grow in leadership skills while their team tackled real challenges and completed necessary projects.

The team lead provided progress updates at monthly staff meetings, sharing accomplishments and outlining next steps. The reports were informal, and all team members, not just the lead, were encouraged to provide feedback and lessons learned. The teams were designed to be a learning experience for everyone involved.

Library leadership encouraged full autonomy and deferred traditionally hierarchical decisions to the appropriate team. This approach demonstrated trust and empowered the teams to make decisions independently (Perrin and Daniel 2017). As a result, each team became a decision-making body for its assigned area. Since recognition is closely correlated with employee engagement (Martin 2020), the monthly meetings also served to acknowledge team progress and celebrate their work. Although team leads were encouraged and supported in their roles, library administrators were prepared to reassign team leadership if needed. Fortunately, this was never necessary. Leadership changes only occurred due to staff transitions.

Positive Outcomes of Cross-Functional Teams

The implementation of cross-functional teams proved to be a valuable initiative for both the library and the broader organization. Among the most successful teams were the Social Engagement, Professional Development, Shared Drive Maintenance, and Video Tutorial Review, each of which is discussed next.

Social Engagement/Culture Club

Recognizing the value of both internal and external social engagement, library administrators aimed to create opportunities for staff to connect beyond their daily responsibilities. Team-building activities and social events held during and outside of work hours help build morale and camaraderie, which are essential to a healthy library culture. However, organizing such events can be time-consuming and administratively burdensome. In addition, when events are planned solely from the top down, without staff input, they may not reflect employees' interests, leading to low engagement and attendance. By forming a team of individuals who genuinely enjoy planning social activities, the library was able to accomplish its administrative goals while empowering team members to contribute in ways that they enjoy and play to their natural strengths. In keeping with the spirit of its mission, the team chose to rename itself at the outset from the more formal "Social Engagement Team" to the more spirited "Culture Club." Figure 1

outlines the initial charge and goals established when the Social Engagement Team was formed.

Figure 1. Social Engagement Team's charge and goals

Charge	Goals
Use design thinking tools to brainstorm, plan, host, and promote team building and social programs for library employees. The goal of these programs is to help us get to know each other, boost morale, and become more involved in the greater campus. The team will schedule and promote at least four social events, games or online activities per year (once a quarter). The events should vary across a wide range of interests to provide experiences attractive to all. The team will develop an event schedule and propose it to the Dean including any budgetary requirements. Once events are approved, the team will plan, organize, and host the events.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify new opportunities for non-work-related programs/events to encourage and support library employees. 2. Communicate regularly with library employees for ideas for social events. 3. Organize, host or otherwise implement the event. 4. Promote awareness and participation among library employees.

Team roles evolved organically as members of each group coalesced and homed in on their goals. One librarian on the Culture Club team noted that the team's success was supported by allowing individuals to naturally take on roles that suited their interests and abilities. He personally took on the task of conducting polls to gauge staff interest in various outings and then crafting persuasive messages to encourage attendance. With a wide range of interests and a strong sense of humor, he found these activities enjoyable and a refreshing addition to his daily responsibilities.

Over the course of two years, the Culture Club hosted approximately ten events, as shown in Table 1. To ensure broad participation, the team used email polls to offer staff a variety of outing options. In doing so, they expanded the original definition of *social engagement* to include volunteer opportunities with local organizations. These service-oriented activities were especially well received and consistently well attended. Most staff members participated in both civic engagement initiatives and social events.

Table 1. Events planned by the Social Engagement Team

Date	Type of event	Event
Summer 2018	Social	Family potluck picnic at local park
Fall 2018	Volunteering	Collect and ship clothes to hurricane victims
Fall 2018	Volunteering	Work at local soup kitchen
Spring 2019	Volunteering	Beach cleanup
Spring 2019	Social	Casino cruise
Summer 2019	Social	Retirement party
Summer 2019	Social	Picnic
Fall 2019	Social	Annual holiday party
Spring 2020	Volunteering	Day of service
Spring 2020	Social	Valentine potluck

Professional Development

Professional development is an essential component for all librarians and library staff, given the dynamic nature of higher education and the continual evolution of technologies related to information resources. In addition to enhancing skills, opportunities for professional and personal growth contribute to a workplace culture where employees feel valued, supported, and engaged. To ensure equitable access to these opportunities, monthly professional development sessions were scheduled at consistent times and on regular days, accommodating staff

schedules across various shifts. Figure 2 outlines the initial charge and goals established when the team was formed. A dedicated professional development team played a key role in identifying and delivering timely, relevant training sessions that addressed immediate needs and were applicable to all staff.

Figure 2. Professional Development Team's charge and goals

Charge	Goals
Use design thinking tools and techniques to develop a professional development program for library employees related to strategic initiatives and the mission of the library. Utilize feedback from employees and the perspective of team members to recommend specific programs. The team is not responsible for individual professional development activities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brainstorm and plan at least one library-wide professional development event each month. 2. After approval of event, implement/schedule/promote event. 3. Offer suggestions for other ways to develop library employees. 4. Create an atmosphere of continuous learning and growth among library employees.

This inclusive approach welcomed topic suggestions from any library employee, fostering a collaborative environment similar to the design thinking model where identifying a pain point or need led to actionable solutions through, in this case, training or presentations.

One notable example was the installation of automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in the library. This sparked discussions about their use and employee responsibilities in the library, which ultimately resulted in a full-day CPR and first aid certification course. This session was particularly well received and attended, as it equipped staff with valuable life-saving skills useful both at work and in their personal lives.

Table 2. Examples of professional development sessions

Date	Session Title
Summer 2018	CPR, First Aid, and AED Training
Summer 2018	Activating an Accessibility Mindset
Fall 2018	Data Management
Spring 2019	Presentation 2.0: Tips, Tricks, & Techniques
Spring 2019	ZERO to PODCAST – Laptops, Mics, and Recording in Closets
Summer 2019	Artifact Salvage and Recovery of Cultural Heritage Items
Summer 2019	Student Success Data with the Director of Institutional Research
Summer 2019	Giving and Receiving Constructive Feedback Workshop
Fall 2019	Ethics in Human Subject Research with Director of IRB
Fall 2019	Interacting with Students on the Autism Spectrum
Spring 2020	Project Ready: Reimagining Equity & Access for Diverse Youth

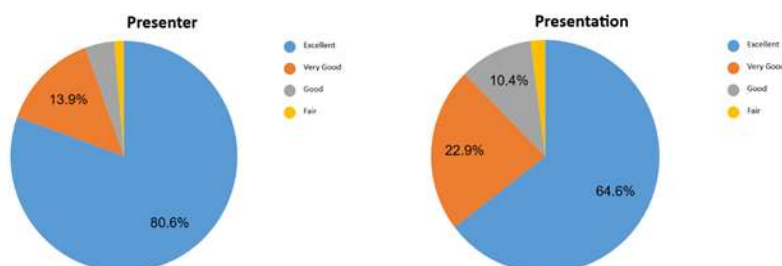
The professional development sessions also provided an opportunity for faculty and staff members to interact and share information, resources, and anecdotes related to their position within the library. These exchanges fostered collegiality and enhanced both social and professional engagement by increasing cross-departmental awareness. Table 2 lists some of the professional development sessions offered.

Each professional development session concluded with a brief survey designed to assess the quality and effectiveness of the presentation. The survey included six questions evaluating the presenter's effectiveness and four questions focused on the usefulness and relevance of the topic. Open-ended prompts invited additional feedback from participants.

Insights gathered from these surveys were used to enhance future sessions and generate new ideas. For example, the "Presentations 2.0: Tips, Tricks and Techniques" workshop was

developed in response to a suggestion submitted through a survey comment. Figure 3 illustrates the survey results from one of the sessions.

Figure 3. Professional development event survey results



Comments:

More time is needed for this type of training. Giving homework would be nice as long as there was a follow up session.

This session could have been structured more. I was often confused.

Provide a review of key points at the end.

What other topics are interested in learning about?

How to give great power point presentations.

Shared Drive Maintenance

During the library's transition from an internal shared drive system to SharePoint, it became essential to curate and reorganize the existing file structure to ensure a smooth migration. The previous shared drive had grown unwieldy over time, lacking centralized oversight and accumulating a vast number of files and folders with little to no organization. Many folders were created for individual use, resulting in extensive duplication and inefficiencies across departments. Figure 4 shows the initial charge and goals defined when the team was formed.

Figure 4. Shared Drive Maintenance Team's charge and goals

Charge	Goals
Use design thinking tools and techniques to brainstorm, develop and help implement a plan for the cleanup and reorganization of the shared (T:) drive. The new organization should be easy to navigate and relatively easy to maintain. The first task for the team will be to develop a strategy and steps for accomplishing the team drive reorganization.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To remove unnecessary files from the team drive.2. To develop an organization schema for the team drive.3. To train library employees to use the new schema.

The team implemented a multi-pronged approach to this project operating in stages to systematically reorganize digital records into accessible, top-level folders that would be intuitive for all staff. The team prioritized broad collaboration, inviting personnel from various areas to participate in weekly meetings. These meetings focused on identifying appropriate sub-folder headings and determining whether documents should be retained or deleted. Staff were provided with pre-meeting questions to help the team understand how the shared drive supported their workflows, ensuring that the reorganization aligned with operational needs. The team operated efficiently, effectively, and with broad collaboration, making it one of the library's most successful cross-functional teams. After the project was completed and presented to the entire library staff, the team leader continued to maintain the shared file structure and provided ongoing guidance on file-naming conventions and organizational practices. With the reorganization goals achieved, the cross-functional team was formally disbanded, allowing its members to contribute their skills and efforts to other teams in need across the library.

Video Tutorial Review

Maintaining and updating video tutorials in research guides and on the library's YouTube channel was a task that often fell behind day-to-day priorities and responsibilities. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, video tutorials were not widely adopted across the library. They were primarily created by the online librarian for online students. At the time, the library offered three

in-person research instruction series—targeted to graduate students, undergraduates, and research-specific topics—which were recorded live and posted to YouTube and linked to research guides. However, these recordings accumulated over time and remained online even as citation guides, discovery tools, and other resources were updated to new versions, resulting in outdated content. This cross-functional team did include members with varying degrees of expertise in instruction, online content, and video creation. Figure 5 shows the initial charge and goals defined when the team was formed. However, the team members were from different departments that didn't typically work together despite this commonality (i.e., the head of instruction, e-resources librarian, and online and distance learning librarian). Their collaboration proved highly effective.

Figure 5. Video Tutorial Review Team's charge and goals

Charge	Goals
Use design thinking tools and techniques to brainstorm, plan, coordinate and create new instructional videos and procedures for promoting, assessing and updating existing videos. This team will not make or update every video but will create the tools (best practices, procedures, etc.) and training so we all feel comfortable creating a quick video to support reference questions, in class instruction, or use of library resources and technology. The Team will also study the use of video in libraries and offer the library leadership suggestions for additional topics, promotional methods or other suggestions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a maintenance/update plan and schedule. 2. Maintain existing videos and update as needed. 3. Determine which additional videos are needed and recruit others to help create them. 4. Monitor usage and suggest ways to increase use and access to videos. 5. Create a best practices and procedures for instructional video creation. 6. Provide support, training and tools so all library employees feel more comfortable creating videos and screencasts.

The team's success was rooted in its clearly defined scope and long-term functionality. Rather than assigning updates to individual staff members, the team was empowered to revise outdated videos and update research guides as needed. They also proactively communicated changes to other library colleagues, ensuring transparency and consistency across platforms such as the YouTube channel and research guides. These regular updates also showed commitment to their charge and to keeping the library's online content current.

Unsuccessful Cross-Functional Teams

While several teams successfully met their goals and demonstrated effective cross-functional collaboration, others struggled to gain momentum and were unable to achieve their objectives due to various obstacles.

Website Improvement Team

The website review team made progress toward its goals (Figure 6) by identifying peer institutions and analyzing their library websites. Recognizing a gap in web design and user experience expertise, the team scheduled professional development webinars to build foundational skills and learn how to assess website usage effectively. Despite these efforts, many of the team's suggestions were not feasible.

Figure 6. Website Improvement Team's charge and goals

Charge	Goals
Review the library website as well as high-quality websites of other academic libraries. Compile a list of suggested improvements based on your analysis and discussion. Use Google Analytics and other data tools to support proposed changes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the library website and analyze based on ideas you determine. 2. Identify and analyze other high-quality academic library websites. 3. Create a list of suggested changes to be presented to the library leadership. 4. Identify ideas for regular website maintenance.

Although the library had control over its content at the time, all changes had to be routed through the university's web services department. The university's standardized web platform constrained customization, limiting the team's ability to implement any of their ideas. Perrin and Daniel (2017) found similar results at their university with their web development and maintenance team. While library leadership had created the goals with the hope that the design thinking model would trickle down into imaginative ideas and creative enhancements to the website, drawing insights gained from reviewing peer institutions, this team was met with concrete limitations of execution. These constraints were further compounded when the university initiated a campus-wide rebranding initiative, transferring full control of web page design to its Marketing department. As a result, this team was stripped of its autonomy and no longer able to contribute meaningfully to the library's web design strategy.

Policy Review Team

The Policy Review Team encountered significant challenges, primarily stemming from an overly expansive scope that involved extensive comparative analysis of policies from numerous external libraries, as outlined in Figure 7. This intellectual undertaking, coupled with unforeseen personnel attrition, rendered the team understaffed for the task. Additionally, insufficient administrative oversight contributed to their inability to progress effectively.

Figure 7. Policy Review Team's charge and goals

Charge	Goals
Review current library policies for appropriateness, brevity, clarity, and consistency and suggest changes. The team should also look at policies that other academic libraries have that we may be missing. The university has a workgroup looking into a standard format for university policies. This team will implement these standardizations as needed.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review current library policies and recommend changes. 2. Identify any new policies needed and recommend examples from which to use as starting place for new policies. 3. Update policies according to standard university format.

As a rule, policies are usually created by upper administration and leadership to provide consistency and guidelines that inform decision-making. In this case, the team was able to do some legwork and research library policies at peer institutions, but the team did not have the autonomy or authority to put anything into place. This group was intrinsically linked to library leadership and needed more guidance than it received about how to proceed. The failure to succeed was thus due to several interrelated factors including insufficient communication and the absence of regular check-ins from leadership. Without structured oversight and clear, consistent communication, the team struggled to stay aligned and make meaningful progress.

LibGuide Review Team

Originally designated the LibGuides Improvement Team, the LibGuide Review Team was tasked with an overwhelmingly broad mandate, as shown in Figure 8. The scope of the project included developing a comprehensive style guide for consistency across all guides and a plan to implement the newly consistent styles among the 200+ guides. Additionally, the charge of the team included monitoring usage, providing assessment, and launching a library marketing campaign.

Figure 8. LibGuide Review Team's charge and goals

Charge	Goals
Use design thinking tools and usage assessment to make research guides more readily discoverable and utilized using user experience techniques and design. The research guides should be streamlined to include only information pertinent to the user in a user-friendly format. The LibGuides Improvement Team will also create a style guide for consistency among the guides in terms of colors, box sizes, amount of text, menu structure and importantly, consistent language.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a comprehensive library research guide style guide and implement consistency among all librarians and guides. 2. Maintain a schedule with library liaisons to update links and content. 3. Monitor usage of LibGuides throughout the year and provide assessment. 4. Collaborate with others in the library to implement a library marketing campaign highlighting the use of research guides to all students.

In retrospect, this project proved to be too extensive for a small group to accomplish. While the team diligently developed a style guide, the remaining objectives remained unfulfilled. Focusing the charge solely on the creation of the LibGuides style guide would have constituted a sufficient and achievable objective for this team. Future iterations could have incorporated mechanisms for gathering feedback from library staff, like the successful approach employed by the Shared Drive Maintenance Team.

Lessons Learned

The adoption of cross-functional teams within the library yielded several successes, as previously enumerated. However, not all teams achieved their objectives. An analysis of both successful and unsuccessful initiatives reveals critical insights and takeaways regarding project scope, resource allocation, participation, and administrative oversight. The lines of reporting between a cross-functional team and the leadership group must be clear. Cross-functional teams require accountability, support, and recognition for the work they are doing (McDonough 2000).

Successful Teams

Several factors underpinned the overall success of the cross-functional team initiative. A structured approach, characterized by mandatory participation, clearly assigned leadership roles, and well-defined charges and goals for each team established a robust framework. Subsequently, granting teams autonomy to innovate and implement solutions fostered a strong sense of ownership and collegiality among the team members as they worked together to accomplish their goals.

By utilizing the design thinking model first during the Strategic Planning Retreat, the process was essentially embedded within the cross-functional teams, providing a group-centric framework to advance the project from the ground up. The baseline design thinking strategic planning exercises allowed team members to engage with people outside their departments and comfort levels.

The collaborative effort kept team members accountable to each other. Likewise, providing status reports and updates at monthly staff meetings provided accountability between teams and library leadership that were crucial for ensuring alignment with broader institutional objectives and facilitating timely administrative support or advice.

Another factor that was only apparent after the fact is that the teams that succeeded most had almost universal involvement from all library staff. Every employee was polled for input on

social engagement and professional development ideas, and all library employees were brought into the SharePoint reorganization team meetings for consultations on the folders and documents under their purview. This universal input seemed to be a recurring theme for success.

The universal input also influenced the longevity and institutionalization of the teams. Each of the successful groups continued to work together, completely self-directed, to maintain their charges. With clear buy-in from all library staff, they were empowered to continue with their charges, offering surveys and assessments to solicit additional input and feedback from their library colleagues and peers.

Unsuccessful Teams

Key takeaways from the less successful teams underscore the need to avoid overambition, establish conservative and realistic goals, and accurately estimate the effort required for task completion. Teams should be created with a clear purpose and clear expectations of what tasks or goals should be accomplished. Likewise, some teams may have needed more nurturing and direction during the initial phases of the project to encourage a safe environment and exchange of ideas within the group. Additionally, each institution has a unique makeup of people, and often there are outliers who are generally reticent to join in group activities. While perhaps obvious, being assigned to a team and asked to participate did not make those individuals any more agreeable to a group dynamic. Strong cooperation among team members is one of the key factors influencing project success, as well as well-defined goals and effective leadership.

The size and composition of a team must also align with the complexity and volume of its assigned tasks. While considerable effort was invested in creating each team, success ultimately depended on ensuring that members possessed the necessary skills to advance the project as well as the requisite authority to enact the change. Routine oversight by library leadership would have helped keep teams on track and empowered them to pivot when encountering obstacles. Notably, the unsuccessful teams never achieved the level of progress necessary to seek or secure universal buy-in from all library employees.

Impact and Future Research

The initial impetus for creating cross-functional teams was to alleviate some of the project and administrative burdens from library leadership. However, the formation of seven separate teams—each with distinct charges and requirements—ultimately introduced a new layer of administrative complexity. This oversight burden was managed inconsistently across teams,

leading to uneven progress. While cross-functional teams have the potential to drive meaningful impact, future efforts should focus on limiting the number of teams to a manageable scope and ensuring that adequate support and oversight structures are in place from the outset.

Medium-to-large libraries could improve their strategic initiatives by implementing design thinking approaches with cross-functional teams, an area that warrants continued research. Future research should examine the long-term sustainability of cross-functional teams across institutions. The following question could be asked: do cross-functional teams remain effective after their initial charges are completed, or do they require continual reinvention to stay relevant? Comparative studies across multiple libraries could also explore whether certain organizational cultures are more conducive to successful cross-functional collaboration than others.

Another important avenue for research is to measure the impact of design thinking specifically within the library context: How does it influence staff morale, innovation capacity, or service quality over time? Finally, further study is needed on strategies for overcoming barriers—such as staff resistance to change or workload constraints—that can limit the transformative potential of both design thinking and cross-functional teams.

Conclusion

The implementation of cross-functional teams, grounded in the design thinking framework, proved to be a transformative initiative within Evans Library. Beyond completing long-overdue infrastructural projects, these teams fundamentally altered how staff engaged with one another and with the institution. By dismantling traditional departmental silos, they created new opportunities for collaboration, broadened participation across faculty and staff, and offered employees a venue to exercise leadership in ways that were not previously available.

The comparison of successful and unsuccessful teams underscores the lessons learned: teams with clear, achievable charges and authority to act succeeded in sustaining momentum, while those with overly ambitious scopes or external constraints struggled to deliver results. These insights point to a broader implication: the sustainability of cross-functional teams depends not only on design and composition but also on alignment with institutional structures and consistent administrative support.

Taken together, the experiences outlined here demonstrate that cross-functional teams can be more than temporary problem-solving units. When deliberately structured and supported, they can become enduring vehicles for innovation, professional development, and

organizational culture change. For libraries facing increasing demands with limited resources, cross-functional teams represent a powerful strategy for distributing leadership, building staff capacity, and advancing institutional goals.

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