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Navigating the Future: Key Trends in Academic Libraries for 2024

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This post was generously contributed by Lily Ko, Secretary of the IFLA Academic and Research Libraries Section.

The Academic and Research Libraries Section has been producing the Country Trend Report annually, drawing on contributions from its members. This report serves as a crucial reference for the “Hot Topics” session, a flagship annual activity. The latest ARL Country Trend Report highlights the most significant trends in academic libraries worldwide for 2024. This blog post summarizes the top six trends identified in the report.

Trend One: Open Access and Open Science Initiatives

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Open Access and Open Science initiatives represent the leading trends in academic and research libraries worldwide, indicating a transition toward more accessible and transparent scholarly communication. These initiatives seek to reduce barriers to information, promote equity in publishing, and enhance the visibility of research outputs.

Open Access

Institutions from various countries are actively participating in raising awareness, advocating for open access, and enabling it. For example:

- The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is undertaking sector-wide efforts that focus on enabling open access and supporting institutions in implementing, communicating, delivering, and evaluating their open access initiatives.
- In Bangladesh, efforts to involve the academic community and raise awareness of the benefits of open access have been gaining momentum.
- In November 2024, the [Alliance of French Public Scientific Publishers](#) was established to complement other national open access initiatives and promote advocacy in this field.

Transformative Agreements

Many institutions have entered into transformative agreements with publishers to promote open access. Examples include:

- The DEAL Consortium in Germany is a read-and-publish agreement that includes an open access option, allowing German researchers to publish in journals from various publishers. The second round of negotiations has begun.
- The South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLiC) leads

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However, financial constraints and sustainability present major concerns, particularly the impact of article processing charges. Libraries across various countries are exploring new options, such as diamond open-access projects in China, Germany, and South Africa. In the United States, researchers are actively exploring new policy developments regarding equity and access in publishing practices.

Open Science

Open Science initiatives are propelling developments in libraries. Libraries in Botswana, Estonia, China, France, and South Africa are advocating for open science and launching various projects. In Australia, CAUL is promoting open educational resources. They are collaborating with the government and higher education stakeholders to publish open textbooks and other materials. Nigeria is also progressing in the development of open educational resources. The United States is aligning these projects with practical knowledge to engage students.

Trend Two: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Technology Integration

The integration of AI and advanced technologies represents a major trend in academic libraries worldwide. Generative AI tools are popular due to their ease of use. Libraries actively promote AI literacy by organizing more conferences, workshops, and webinars to educate users on how to use these tools responsibly. They also address the ethical implications of AI, ensuring users are informed about responsible practices.

Libraries are addressing challenges posed by AI, including authors' rights, data protection, and biases. Furthermore, sustainability and energy costs related to generative AI are receiving increased attention.

In addition to promoting AI literacy, libraries are investigating ways to utilize AI to enhance access to library collections and services. This encompasses the use of AI technology for special collections, a topic that is gaining popularity.

Trend Three: Collection Development and Resource Sharing

Efficient collection development and resource sharing are crucial for the sustainability and relevance of academic libraries. In Ghana, the Consortium for Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH) plays a significant role in facilitating ongoing subscriptions to essential electronic resources, including eBooks and academic databases.

In Nigeria, academic libraries strive to maintain a balance between print and digital collections. However, budget constraints often limit access to newly published materials. To overcome these challenges, libraries participate in resource-sharing consortia, utilize Inter-Library Loan (ILL) services, and collaborate with the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) to access essential resources at reduced costs.

Meanwhile, in the United States, libraries are increasingly focused on re-evaluating their collections and enhancing collection management practices.

Trend Four: Professional Development and Staff Retention

Ongoing professional development and effective staff management are essential for the success and resilience of academic libraries. As libraries navigate an increasingly complex environment—shaped by emerging technologies and shifting sociopolitical dynamics—library staff must continuously engage in training, reskilling, and upskilling to remain current and effective.

However, staff retention is becoming an increasing concern. High retirement rates, insufficient compensation, low morale, and burnout are making it difficult to keep skilled librarians. These challenges not only affect service quality but also threaten the long-term sustainability of library operations. Addressing these issues necessitates strategic investment in staff well-being, competitive pay, and clear pathways for career growth and recognition.

Trend Five: Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaboration and strategic partnerships are increasingly essential for enhancing library services and expanding their reach. These cooperative efforts foster innovation, facilitate the exchange of best practices, and enable libraries to collectively tackle shared challenges in a rapidly evolving information landscape.

For example, in China, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Library Alliance held its Annual Meeting and Forum in November 2024, bringing together library professionals to discuss cooperation and future development strategies.

In Estonia, libraries are also adopting collaborative models, such as the implementation of a new library system in cooperation with partners. These initiatives showcase how partnerships can lead to more efficient systems and stronger professional networks.

Trend Six: Cultural and Social Initiatives

Academic libraries are increasingly engaging in cultural and social initiatives that address broader societal challenges and promote inclusivity. Australia's focus on decolonization and indigenization reflects a commitment to integrating Indigenous perspectives and addressing the legacy of colonialism.

In Germany and South Africa, libraries are aligning their activities with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting their role in supporting sustainable development. In the United States, initiatives aimed at student well-being underscore the significance of addressing mental health and fostering supportive learning environments.

Comparative Overview: ARL vs. IFLA Trend Reports 2024

The ARL Country Trend Report 2024 focuses on developments in academic and research libraries, while the IFLA Trend Report 2024 provides a broader perspective across various library sectors worldwide. The table below outlines the key trends identified in both reports:

Trends	IFLA ARL Country Trend Report 2024	IFLA Trend Report 2024
Trend One	Open Access and Open Science Initiatives	Knowledge practices are changing
Trend Two	Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Technology Integration	AI and other technologies are transforming society
Trend Three	Collection Development and Resource Sharing	Trust us being renegotiated
Trend Four	Professional Development and Staff Retention	Skills and abilities are becoming more complex
Trend Five	Collaboration and partnerships	Digital technologies are unevenly distributed

Trend Six	Cultural and Social Initiatives	Information systems are using more resources
Trend Seven		People are seeking community connections

Two key trends are common in these two reports. Both reports emphasize the transformative impact of AI and emerging technologies, along with the increasing importance of continuous professional development to keep pace with evolving skills and competencies.

Conclusion

The 2024 ARL Country Trend Report captures the dynamic evolution of academic libraries, highlighting key trends such as the expansion of Open Access and Open Science, the integration of AI, efficient resource management, professional development, strategic collaboration, and cultural and social engagement. These trends underscore the vital role academic libraries play in adapting to the changing needs of their communities and contributing to the advancement of global knowledge.

References

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