Context

The ARL strategic thinking and design process posed four layers of engagement for the research library, ranging from engagement with the individual user to society as a whole. A powerful concept emerging from this process was the construct of the “Open Symposium,” the notion of research libraries, both individually and collectively, facilitating exploration and exchange within the academic community. The Libraries that Learn initiative focuses on engagement with the higher education community, and proposes the “Open Symposium” as offering mutually beneficial aims to libraries, higher education institutions, and the larger ecosystem of the academy. The “Open Symposium” brings a frame, a call to action, and a motivation to the research library to contribute to the mission and ambitions of our institutions.

The “Open Symposium” concept conveys the opportunity for research libraries to engage in the pressing issues and discourse that drive the intellectual and professional communities of which we are a part. The Libraries that Learn initiative captures and builds on the “Open Symposium” concept: libraries can serve as catalysts in bringing pressing issues to the fore and providing opportunity for broad community engagement. Libraries can contribute to higher education dialogues about these issues and can provide leadership in addressing institutional challenges. The Libraries that Learn initiative offers a space in which to educate the ARL membership about these large challenges and to incubate the design, funding, and building of coalitions of libraries that bring expertise and evidence (data) as well as new concepts, models, and operational designs to further the missions of our institutions.

Framing Statement: Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems

Higher education is facing grand challenges and wicked problems that are central to its future, its development, and its sustainability. Discussions of these problems are ever-present in the news media (e.g., affordability and accountability) and featured regularly on our campuses (e.g., curricular reform and cross-disciplinary research). Libraries can serve as strategic and instrumental agents in supporting the necessary transformations of higher education in addressing these problems. The Libraries that Learn initiative will both educate the ARL member community about grand challenges and wicked problems facing higher education and propose domains in which the membership can advance models or projects to contribute to solutions.

The Libraries that Learn design team proposes a focus on higher education’s problems and opportunities where libraries can make a difference. While there are some challenges that the research library community might advance on its own, the intended scope of Libraries that Learn is to work on those that are central to the mission and ambitions of our institutions and the academy, not problems that are primarily about libraries. Some topics may well intersect – e.g., digital preservation. Some themes may apply only to certain groups of institutions (e.g., land grant or institutions with medical schools). In all cases, however, the critical question is the degree to which libraries offer distinctive expertise and assets leading to demonstrable contribution, acting individually or collectively.
The Committee on Coherence at Scale is addressing some of these challenges with a novel approach. In particular, the Committee has as a focus the transition from analog to digital in higher education—a critical dimension of change. It seeks to ensure “the programmatic, concerted, and efficient development of large-scale projects that, if built as coherent elements of an emerging digital environment, will significantly enhance scholarly productivity and enrich teaching.” The work of the Committee on Coherence at Scale offers a promising context for the Libraries that Learn initiative, as the Coherence at Scale undertaking is, at heart, about the knowledge work of the academy.

Projects

Projects emerging from the Libraries that Learn initiative may take varied forms, including, but not limited to, the following:

A. **ARL’s educational role:** Use the programs at membership meetings (and other ARL-sponsored events) to educate and enlighten our community about grand challenges and wicked problems.

B. **Network of expertise:** Identify and build a community of experts around a particular grand challenge or wicked problem. Bring together a group with experience in a range of domains that can help us identify opportunities to use library expertise and evidence to help to answer strategic questions facing ARL institutions. Membership in this community of experts could be drawn from outside the library world, from libraries outside ARL, and from the international library community.

C. **Libraries’ models:** Study the impact of libraries’ work to address grand challenges and wicked problem (e.g., libraries’ new organizational structures, positions, and processes created to support cross-disciplinary research or libraries’ new roles in support of scholarly communication and educational transformations such as open educational resources).

D. **Collaborative projects:** Establish ARL as a convener or facilitator for pairs or small groups of libraries that are especially interested in taking the lead on a particular grand challenge or wicked problem or in addressing a specific grand challenge or wicked problem that does not emerge as a priority for ARL collective action (e.g., measuring the impact of clinical work on the health of our communities).

E. **Institutional Analytics:** Contribute to institutional priority metrics, analytics and benchmarking. There is an opportunity to leverage expertise within the ARL assessment community to identify new roles that libraries can play in institutional data analytics work, to support specific projects that map library activities to institutional metrics, and to replicate experiments in varied institutional settings to capture comparative analysis.

F. **Policy and Advocacy:** Advocate in multiple policy arenas for owning, maintaining, accessing and using our own institutional data, including institutional analytics and learning analytics.

Member Priorities

In an effort to better understand the current landscape and to identify opportunities for communication and collaboration, the Libraries That Learn Design Team led a member-
engagement activity at the Fall 2015 Membership Meeting. After the team chair provided an overview of design team’s work to date, members were invited to complete a questionnaire individually and in conversation with others in small group discussions. The questions were designed to articulate grand challenges and wicked problems that were perceived to be pervasive, describe ARL’s role in exploring (with the membership and beyond) challenges and problems, identify partners and models to address these issues, and discover current activities already underway to help tackle these problems.

Reviewing the members’ responses resulted in the identification of broad categories of interest: affordability, changing roles of libraries, collaborations, collections, data and analytics, digital projects, diversity, faculty success, funding, globalization, infrastructure, interdisciplinarity, the “narrative” about library contributions, preservation, research data management, research, scholarly communication, student success, and sustainability. However, many of the identified issues were focused on challenges for libraries or individual institutions. By focusing on the issues of concern to the success and advancement of higher education, the Design Team developed recommendations in five key areas (see below).

Once the next steps are finalized, further analysis of the responses will be completed in order to summarize the feedback in these areas:

- Best methods for informing membership
- Logical partners
- Models to explore
- Relevant current activities among the membership
- Members to participate or lead ongoing conversations

This analysis will be shared with the Coordinating Committee and posted on the Members Only site of the ARL website.

**Recommendations**

1. **Research Data Management:** Leverage the planned focus of the Spring 2016 Membership Meeting to convene a program that explores dimensions of data curation from discipline/association perspectives—e.g., bring in individuals leading discussions within disciplines or scholarly/professional associations on research sharing, policy, ethics, reproducibility, and falsifiability.

2. **Student Success:** Explore methodologies and existing experiments for assessing library contributions to student learning outcomes. Consider a collaborative effort around this topic with the assessment committee.

3. **Affordability:** Develop program or potential collaborative project around strategies for addressing student course costs and content affordability, including OER, leveraging collection funding, and sustainability of collections.

4. **Internationalization:** Convene program with external speakers about grand challenge research themes as institutional strategies for interdisciplinary and global approaches to societal problems (e.g., health inequity, water resources, sustainable environments, etc.).

5. **Digital Preservation:** Identify group of institutions committed to pursuing digital preservation as a collective in response to the “hunchery” presentation.
Process Recommendations

In order to surface the grand challenges and wicked problems that are facing higher education at any given time, the Design Team proposes several methods for tracking issues:

1. Invite the Leadership Research Fellows 2016-2017 cohort to develop and maintain a “top ten” list of issues facing higher education institutions similar to the Horizon Report or the ACRL Trend List. The planned Fellows Institutes offers an opportunity to explore these themes with institutional leaders.

2. Encourage directors to share grand challenges and wicked problems on the directors’ listserv using the subject line: Grand Challenges and Wicked Problems. A member of the ARL staff will collect these challenges and problems for posting on the Members Only site. Directors could refer to this ongoing list at any point in time and the Coordinating Committee could use this list for project development. The Member Engagement and Outreach Committee could refer to this list for program ideas for future Association meetings.

3. Engage the membership in a discussion about grand challenges and wicked problems once a year during a meeting of the Association or every third Association meeting. Maintain focus on those challenges and problems that are of interest to higher education institutions and the academy at large.

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