

# Following The Phosphorous Trail Of Research Library Mission Statements Into Present And Future Harbors

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University libraries are complex organizations in terms of their internal structures and the variety of missions they must accomplish. This complexity makes university libraries interesting objects of study. These organizations, themselves imbedded within larger and more complex university structures, exist in an uncertain environment. The packaging and delivery of information is rapidly changing such that libraries have to maintain and sustain two different information streams; the physical and the virtual. The one constant is that university libraries, like all organizations, must perform their missions while adapting to future challenges and changes.<sup>1</sup>

One means for examining complex organizations such as university libraries is to analyze their mission statements. Mission statements are forms of organizational discourse or ways of talking about and representing the organization to its constituencies. Mission statements provide a privileged window for understanding organizations on at least three levels. First, they are usually produced in a top-down process and thus reflect the thinking of organizational leaders. Second, these statements identify activities the organization considers important. These activities are constitutive of what it means to be such as organization. Third, future or-

ganizational trajectories are suggested by what libraries articulate as their mission.

Academic libraries appear to recognize the importance of developing mission statements. Hastreiter, et al. report 85 percent of the academic libraries they surveyed had mission statements, a 30 percent increase since 1985.<sup>2</sup> Kuchi analyzed 111 Association of Research Libraries (ARL) member libraries' web pages, finding 87 libraries or 78 percent made these documents accessible within their libraries' web sites.<sup>3</sup>

Mission statements provide insights into how university libraries constitute themselves and the availability of these statements within library websites ensures a comprehensive sample can be readily obtained. This study analyzes mission statements produced by ARL members located in the United States. A fine-grained analysis of mission statement content allows us to discern how university libraries perceive themselves in today's environment while exposing strategies used in the design of this organizational discourse.

## Literature Review

The increase in libraries with mission statements is reflected by an increase in studies that examine this dis-

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course in order to understand how libraries organize and interact with their environment. Brophy analyzed academic library mission statements in the United Kingdom, pointing out that the rhetorical process of designing these statements is as important as having them in how previously unexamined goals and agendas are made visible and available for examination.<sup>4</sup>

Mathieu examined mission statements of 83 private colleges located in the Midwestern United States, focusing on how these colleges incorporated location characteristics, i.e., rural or urban, as part of their missions. Matthieu concluded these organizations were similar in ignoring distinctive characteristics of the environment.<sup>5</sup>

Other scholars have examined libraries in different states, identifying specific practices in relationship to their mission statements. Best-Nichols studied 11 publicly supported academic libraries in North Carolina to see whether these libraries identified their local communities as audiences targeted to receive support.<sup>6</sup> Bangert surveyed mission statements from 58 academic libraries of all types in California, focusing on how these libraries constitute themselves.<sup>7</sup> Her study provides an important cross sample of different academic library mission statements. There is both agreement across library types on what is central to a library's purpose and variation in how different academic libraries enact these purposes. Schneider examined the missions of 20 regional academic libraries in Ohio. Their statements were more detailed and encompassing than those written by the parent library of the university, especially in the area of serving the public at large.<sup>8</sup> Shires continued this focus on identifying the relationship between academic libraries and service to the public in Florida, concluding that academic libraries focus their attention and resources mostly on direct or affiliated users who are students, faculty, or staff.<sup>9</sup>

Researchers have also considered what should be included in a library's mission. Academic libraries at all levels identified technology as a key influence for the future,<sup>10</sup> yet many libraries fail to identify technological roles in their mission statements.<sup>11</sup> Technology is also linked to critical information skills identified by many libraries which strengthens this call for locating technology statements within academic library mission documents.<sup>12</sup>

The close analysis of library mission statements is becoming more widespread in the literature but these studies are mostly regional in their scope. There has been no comprehensive analysis of library missions across the

same academic level of institution in the United States. This study of ARL member libraries is designed to fill this gap in our understanding of complex academic libraries.

## Method

Libraries belonging to ARL were selected for this study.<sup>13</sup> These libraries tend to be large university libraries, providing a comprehensive and homogeneous sample. Criteria for inclusion in this study included being located in the United States and being an academic library. A total of 16 Canadian university libraries and 8 non-academic libraries, i.e., the Library of Congress and Boston Public Library, were excluded from the sample. Of the remaining 99 ARL libraries, 92 had mission statements available for this study either from their web sites or in response to an email request for this information. The remaining 7 libraries either did not have a mission statement or are rewriting them at the time this data was collected in December, 2006. The libraries in this study are listed in Appendix A.

The mission statements were analyzed and coding categories created inductively using language contained in these statements.<sup>14</sup> Nouns and verbs were used to identify categories of content. After all the statements were coded and the categories exhausted, categories related to each other linguistically, i.e., synonyms, or pragmatically in terms of functional relationships, were collapsed into single categories. The 92 mission statements yielded 71 different categories. These categories were then grouped based upon common functions into 16 general or functional categories (see Appendix B).

The 16 functional categories are not orthogonal to each other. Categories such as *education* were often mentioned in connection with orienting the library to the university's mission of teaching and research along with providing information literacy instruction or supporting education. Such items were included in multiple functional categories based upon their place and function in each library's mission statement. This also reflects the characteristic of polysemy associated with natural language where words have multiple meanings based in part upon their context of use.

The initial classification of items into functional categories is supported by a semantic analysis which focuses on identifying different possible meanings for terms and organizes these terms in relationship to each other based upon degrees of meaning. A semantic analysis is used to articulate differences and similarities in the functional categories of *primary focus* and *collections*.

A third layer of analysis examines mission statements in their entirety, looking to identify structural similarities and differences. A typology of mission statement types is created and outlined. The number of categories identified for each library's statement were summed and the libraries were rank ordered. The range was between 2 and 24 categories coded for each library's mission. Comparisons were made across each functional category. Clusters of statements in libraries with the same numbers of categories suggest similarities exist among these libraries. Conversely, natural break-points or areas where differences exist either in the type or amount of categories coded were sought in order to identify different mission statement structures.

## Results

The results are presented here for each of the 16 functional categories in order from the highest to lowest category. A brief summary of the statistics and analysis is provided below. The majority of mission statements produced and used by university libraries identify who the primary audiences are that receive service from the library along with identification and specification of the library's instructional role, research role, access to resources, and collections.

**Table 1: Top 5 functional categories (N = 92)**

| Category            | Number of Libraries | Percentage |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Primary focus       | 76 libraries        | 82.6%      |
| Instructional role  | 66 libraries        | 71.4%      |
| Research role       | 64 libraries        | 69.5%      |
| Access to resources | 50 libraries        | 54.3%      |
| Collections         | 47 libraries        | 51%        |

Identification of these categories by a majority of the libraries surveyed was not surprising these roles represent traditional components of librarianship. The top two categories identified by California university libraries were *supports research* (57%) and *supports curriculum* (57%) respectively.<sup>15</sup> These categories map closely to this study's *research* and *instruction* categories. Bangert coded *information literacy* as a separate category where this study puts *information literacy* under *instructional roles*.<sup>16</sup>

### Primary focus

The *primary focus* category contains 7 sub-categories that can be divided into two semantic groupings based upon how broad or narrow the definition of the term is. Semantically broad terms found in library mission

statements to identify audiences include *learners, users, diverse populations*, and the *university community*. These terms are ambiguous as to who the actual audience is while functioning to be inclusive. Semantically narrow terms such as *students, faculty, or staff* are much more deterministic in identifying the audience targeted for service by the library.

Broad terms were used by 28 libraries in their mission statements to identify audiences targeted for primary service. Narrow or focused terms were used by 31 libraries to identify the audiences they are targeting for primary service. Of these libraries, 30 libraries named *faculty* and 29 of these libraries also named *students* as primary service targets. There were 14 libraries that identified *students, faculty* and *staff* as primary service targets.

### Instructional roles

Many academic libraries claim instructional roles. According to Boston University, "The Library's mission is to support teaching, learning and research..."<sup>17</sup> where Arizona State University begins its library mission with, "In response to instructional and research needs..."<sup>18</sup> These two formulations are typical of how 66 libraries represented instruction as part of their mission. Additional statements identified specific categories of instruction. *Information literacy* was singled out by 18 libraries and *education* singled out by 26 libraries. An additional 14 libraries identified both *information literacy* and *education* as instructional roles.

### Research roles

Research roles were identified in 64 library mission statements. As with instructional roles, research is often expressed as part of a formulaic goal phrase. The term *research* was identified by 43 libraries, *discovery* identified by 29 libraries, and *scholarly communication* identified by 13 libraries. The research and instructional role categories are almost identical in the percentage of libraries invoking these categories. The slight numerical edge given to instruction (71.4%) over research (69.5%) is mirrored by the slight edge in students versus faculty being identified as primary service targets. These findings suggest a slight bias exists in mission statements, favoring students and instruction over faculty and research. This is consistent with the current cultural bias that favors learning over research.

### Access to resources

Access to resources was identified by 50 libraries. The

**Table 2: Sub-categories of Collection**

|                                       |              |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Build, acquire, or select             | 36 libraries |
| Manage or organize                    | 29 libraries |
| Deliver or present                    | 21 libraries |
| Materials in a broad range of formats | 14 libraries |

term *access* or a phrasing implying access is mentioned by 21 libraries without any further elaboration. An additional 10 libraries identify *effective access* to resources. The remaining 19 libraries identify a combination of access including links to remote resources.

### Collections

Some scholars argue collection functions should receive clear expression as a library mission.<sup>19</sup> Amplification of collection functions helps in guiding and justifying collection decisions made in the face of competing and often scarce resources. Just over 51 percent or 47 university libraries in this study addressed collections as a functional role in their mission statements. This statistic inversely highlights the 45 libraries that did not address collection roles, suggesting that this remains an issue that needs to be addressed.

The aggregate sum of libraries that identify specific functional roles informs us only which roles receive attention but not how libraries practice the functions articulated in their mission statements. A close examination of the collections category and its sub-categories reveals it to be the most fully developed in terms of specific sub-categories and in the number of libraries includes multiple sub-categories of collection in their mission statements.

More libraries identify multiple aspects of collections than for any other functional category except primary focus. Of the 47 libraries identifying a collection role, 33 libraries identify between two and four collection sub-categories and 14 libraries identify a single sub-category within collections.

### Semantic analysis of collection and information

The fact that most of the libraries identifying collection as a functional category in their mission statements

have specific and multiple sub-categories suggests agreement among libraries about what activities constitute or are relevant to collection roles. It would be a mistake to conclude that these same libraries agree on what is being collected. A semantic analysis of the language used to identify collection roles reveals considerable latitude of statements along a most specific to most abstract continuum.

The University of California-Davis Library declares, "...its mission is to collect, preserve, and provide access to books, journals, manuscripts, documents..."<sup>20</sup> This statement clearly identifies traditional library materials in print formats as part of the library's collection role. The University of Massachusetts-Amherst Library's mission statement reads in part, "By combining the latest information technology with excellent public service, the staff builds and maintains a rich information environment..."<sup>21</sup> The ambiguity in the phrase *rich information environment* doesn't mention or even imply traditional materials in print formats. Because distinct variations exist in the phrases used to identify collection roles, a semantic analysis was used to uncover subtle shades of meaning. Table 3 outlines the noun phrases used in the collection components of library mission statements.

The categories presented in table 3 are not orthogonal in that several libraries used multiple phrases within the collection component of their statements. For example, the University of Chicago Library "...builds collections and provides access to information resources..."<sup>22</sup> The tacit meaning of the noun *collections* associated with

**Table 3: Noun phrases used to identify collection development**

|                                   |  |    |
|-----------------------------------|--|----|
| paper                             | Collections  | 18 |
| paper                             | Distinctive or unique collections                              | 3  |
| paper and other formats           | Collections and other published resources                      | 1  |
| paper and other formats           | Materials and information                                      | 2  |
| paper and other formats           | Diverse collections or collections in a broad range of formats | 5  |
| all formats                       | Collections in all formats                                     | 3  |
| all formats                       | Record of human thought and creativity                         | 1  |
| all formats                       | Information in all formats                                     | 2  |
| moving towards electronic formats | Knowledge resources  | 2  |
| moving towards electronic formats | Scholarly information or resources                             | 5  |
| moving towards electronic formats | Information resources  | 22 |

physical materials is recognized whereas *access to information resources* seems more ambiguous.

*Collections* and terms such as *materials* tend to be most closely associated with traditional physical (paper) products. Collection is defined both as “an assembly of items such as works of art, pieces of writing, or natural objects, especially one systematically ordered” and as “a book or recording containing various texts, poems, songs, etc.”<sup>23</sup> Information is defined as “facts provided or learned about something or someone” and as “computed data as processed, stored, or transmitted by a computer.”<sup>24</sup> Collections as a term anchors us in the realm of paper products while information moves us away from the physical and towards electronic data.

The semantic distinction between collection and information resources can be found in statements such as the University of Colorado at Boulder Library whose mission encompasses “...providing materials, information, and services that support the University’s mission.”<sup>25</sup> The concept of *collection* or *materials* is specifically separated from *information*. This semantic movement from terms that highlight physical items towards other (electronic) formats is marked as well by phrases that identify *collections in all formats*. This is an overt expansion of the noun *collections* that tacitly recognizes the semantic associations of *collection* with print items while acknowledging other sources. The noun phrase *information in all formats* serves a similarly inclusive and clarifying function here. Information in all formats must be distinguishable from information or information resources in a principled manner or the terms logically collapse into a single category. The definition of information does not completely position it within the realm of electronic media. However, the definition and lack of a clear connection to physical materials other than electronic storage and transmission media strongly favors information being linked to electronic resources. This interpretation is strengthened by the qualifier statement in the noun phrase *information in all formats*.

The data presented in table 3 lists paper as the preferred medium at the top beside collections. As one moves down the continuum, a distinct shift towards paper and other formats is evident in phrases such as *collections and other resources* or *materials and information*. The midrange point of the continuum is where *collections in all formats* and *information in all formats* are juxtaposed against each other. This middle ground overtly recognizes all materials and all information sources while starting from the two opposite ends of the continuum anchored by the nouns *collection* (physical) and

*information* (electronic). The semantic shift away from paper is visible as one moves towards the more ambiguous *information resources* phrase at the other end of the continuum.

Another analytical twist involves comparing these results with Bangert’s study where only 24 percent of the university libraries indicated *develops collections* as a primary mission.<sup>26</sup> If the semantic analysis holds here, about 25 percent of the libraries in this study use the term *collection* and/or *materials* to refer to the conventional development of a physical collection. The other roughly 25 percent of the libraries in this study use the term *information* to identify their collection activities. This suggests that collection development has not declined as much as it is shifting to reflect the new realities of a technological and information-rich environment.

The next section presents information on the remaining 9 functional categories that were shared by less than half of the 92 library mission statements analyzed in this study.

### University mission

The university’s mission was mentioned by 42 libraries using formulaic phrases with little variability. This sug-

**Table 4: Functional categories with less than 50% coding (N = 92)**

| Functional category             | Number of libraries | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| University mission              | 42 libraries        | 45.6%      |
| Service role                    | 40 libraries        | 43.4%      |
| Preservation role               | 37 libraries        | 40.0%      |
| Secondary focus                 | 33 libraries        | 35.8%      |
| External connections            | 33 libraries        | 35.8%      |
| Technological role              | 27 libraries        | 29.3%      |
| Library as physical place       | 24 libraries        | 26.0%      |
| Staff statements                | 24 libraries        | 26.0%      |
| Social roles                    | 20 libraries        | 21.7%      |
| Future statements               | 19 libraries        | 20.6%      |
| Library’s position re community | 13 libraries        | 14.1%      |

gests an underlying logic to the construction of library mission statements, a theme which will be articulated later in this paper.

### **Service role**

Service roles were identified in 40 library mission statements with 31 libraries simply using the term service in their statements and 9 libraries identifying either outreach or patient care.

### **Preservation role**

Preservation roles were identified by 37 libraries. The generic noun preservation was used by 27 libraries while 10 libraries identified a specific type of resource for preservation such as *preserving the historical record* or *the most important documents*. Implicit in these statements is that preservation is done on a limited basis and not for the entire library holdings.

### **Secondary focus**

The secondary focus category consists of the external or unaffiliated audiences who can expect to receive services from academic libraries. These audiences are varied and can include secondary or high school students, local community members, and professional people.<sup>27</sup>

Broad and inclusive language is often used to identify audiences targeted as receiving secondary service. Categories such as *local community/city members* or the *scholarly community* include most all people without specifically identifying narrower groups or subgroups of people. The phrase *people of the state of...* is most closely associated with land grant universities.

Shire points out that 86 percent of the libraries in his study did not actively promote their services to the public.<sup>28</sup> In this study, 33 libraries identified at least one secondary audience for service. That means 59 ARL libraries or 65percent of this sample did not identify any secondary audiences for services.

**Table 5: Sub-categories under Secondary Focus \***

|                          |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| local community/city     | 10 libraries |
| people of the state of.. | 18 libraries |
| scholarly community      | 12 libraries |
| partners/clients         | 3 libraries  |

\* Thirty-three individual libraries identified a secondary focus. Seven of these libraries had items coded in more than one sub-category. Five libraries identified both the people of the state of and scholarly communities and one library identified both local community/city and scholarly communities for service.

### **External connections**

External connections with other institutions or groups outside the immediate university community were apparent in 33 mission statements. These external connections included 14 libraries that simply identified collaborations, 2 libraries that articulated specific collaborations such as involvement in consortia, and 17 libraries claiming involvement in local, national, or international collaborations. This emphasis on local, national, or international collaborations was also noted by Shires.<sup>29</sup>

### **Technological roles**

Current and new technologies were identified by 27 libraries. This number seems low given the impact of technology on libraries in the new millennium. This is also in stark contrast to earlier findings that libraries view technology as a defining force for the future.<sup>30</sup> It is possible that this lack of emphasis is due to a maturing of technology in libraries such that new technology is simply part of the status quo and thus receives no special mention.

### **Library as physical place**

A focus on the physical environment provided by the library was found in 24 library mission statements. Consistent with findings that teaching or learning is slightly favored over research, 12 libraries identified providing space conducive to learning as important and 8 of these 12 libraries including Case Western Reserve University work to "...provide physical places that welcome and contribute to research and learning" as part of their mission.<sup>31</sup> The library was also described as being a center for learning, a learning commons, or a place for collaborative learning by 10 libraries.

### **Staff statements**

Staff statements that referred to the library's staff were mentioned by 24 libraries and 11 libraries identified specific staff attributes such as skill and knowledge or ability to be innovative as important contributions to the library's mission.

### **Social role**

The Ohio State University Libraries mission statement reads, "To these ends the Libraries...foster an environment conducive to...life long learning."<sup>32</sup> Phrases such as *life long learning* are classified as social roles or desired social outcomes that a library hopes to accomplish as part of its mission. The missions of 20 libraries included

social outcomes. *Life long learning* was the most consistent phrase used by 10 libraries. Other phrases such as *intellectual growth* or *freedom, diversity of ideas, good citizenship, a well informed society, and quality of life* were identified by several libraries as desired outcomes.

### **Future statements**

Only 19 libraries crafted mission statements that made explicit references to the future. The focus of these future statements varied from concentrating on identifying the needs of future users to a focus on new technologies, and a focus on developing effective teaching and information systems for future users. The mission statement of Emory University, to "...advance the discovery and transmission of knowledge for students and scholars of today and tomorrow" is a typical future-oriented phrase.<sup>33</sup>

### **Library's position in the community**

This category received the least attention, being mentioned by only 13 libraries. Statements that identified the library as a major cultural repository, a central information source, a central research library, or a center of community were coded as positioning the library in relationship to the university and community at large.

The small number of libraries that articulated their position in the community is surprising given the traditional view of the library as being both the physical and intellectual center of the university. About 44 percent of the 16 university libraries in Bangert's study claimed being a global gateway to information, a category roughly analogous to being a central information source or center.<sup>34</sup> This apparent decline in the traditional position may reflect the current reality that libraries are no longer positioned or able to position themselves as the gateway to information given the plethora of competing information resources and shrinking university budgets.

### **Structure of Library Mission Statements**

The use of formulaic noun phrases by libraries was first noted in the instruction and research coding categories of this paper and in how many libraries refer specifically to their parent institution's mission. Similarities also exist between colleges and universities in terms of what is viewed as being central to their missions<sup>35</sup> Schneider noted similarities among the main university libraries and among the regional libraries while pointing out that mission statements of these two library types differed markedly from each other.<sup>36</sup> These regularities suggest

some sort of underlying message design logic is associated with mission statements.

If university libraries produce statements that are homogeneous in their content and structure, we still have to explain variations in both semantic content and number of categories represented in each mission statement. Variations in semantic content exist in the primary focus and collection categories and in the number of categories coded for each mission statement.

Variations in content and design remind us that mission statements are rhetorical devices designed to accomplish a wide range of institutional purposes and goals. The remaining section of this work analyses the structure of these statements and identifies a typology of three different kinds of structures that account for both variations and similarities in library mission statements.

The variations in semantic content and the range of categories coded for each statement are functions of the degree of specificity. In other words, the most distinguishing feature is how narrowly purposes and goals are expressed rather than what is expressed. The 92 ARL library mission statements can be divided into three different types; macro level, micro level, and meso level mission statements.<sup>37</sup> Macro level mission statements are characterized by the use of semantically broad terms and the least number of different types of statements. Micro level mission statements possess the greatest degree of specificity, using specific and multiple terms to identify aspects of the library's mission. Micro level mission statements also feature the greatest number of different statement types. Meso level mission statements are positioned between macro and micro levels in the amount of both their semantic and numerical specificity. Table 6 highlights areas of differences between these three different rhetorical structures.

Macro, meso, and micro level mission statements are similar in their inclusion of broad based nouns that identify their primary audiences. They differ considerably however in the percentages of nouns used to identify specific audiences such as *students, faculty, and staff*, with the greater specificity belonging to the micro level mission statements. This clear pattern of increased specificity occurs across 12 of the 16 functional categories and is evident in table 7.

Some functional categories such as collections receive relatively low levels of coding at the macro level then receive higher amounts of coding across the meso and micro levels. In these cases, the distinguishing characteristic noted in table 6 is the amount of sub-catego-

| <b>Table 6: Mission Statement Typology</b>   |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Macro level</i> mission statements<br>N = 30 libraries  | <i>Meso level</i> mission statements<br>N = 34 Libraries  | <i>Micro level</i> mission statements<br>N = 28 Libraries  |
| Libraries with 2–6 mission statement categories.   | Libraries with 7–11 mission statement categories.   | Libraries with 12–24 mission statement categories.   |
| Broad terms used to identify primary audiences by 30% of libraries. Specific terms used by 6.6% of libraries.                | Broad terms used to identify primary audiences by 32.3% of libraries. Specific terms used by 38% of libraries.  | Broad terms used to identify primary audiences by 25% of libraries. Specific terms used by 61% of libraries. Majority of libraries identify multiple types of users      |
| Instruction roles identified by 43% of libraries. These roles first mentioned by libraries with at least 4 categories coded. | Instruction roles identified by 82% of libraries. Information literacy and education roles specified. Both IL and Education roles claimed by 1 library. | Instruction roles identified by 89% of libraries. Both IL and Education roles claimed by 9 libraries.  |
| Research roles identified by 53% of libraries.   | Research roles identified by 73.5% of libraries.  | Research roles identified by 85.7% of libraries.   |
| Access to resources is identified by 36% of the libraries.   | Access to resources is identified by 47% of the libraries.  | Access to resources is identified by 82% of the libraries. Most libraries specify types of access.   |
| Collection roles identified by 33% of libraries. Only 1 library identifies multiple sub-categories in collections.           | Collection roles identified by 79.4% of libraries. 12 libraries identify multiple sub-categories in collections.  | Collection roles identified by 78.5% of libraries. 16 libraries identify multiple sub-categories in collections and 7 libraries identify all collection sub-categories.  |
| The University mission is referred to by 33.3% of libraries.   | The University mission is referred to by 35.4% of libraries.  | The University mission is referred to by 75% of libraries.   |
| Service role identified by 46.6% of libraries.   | Service role identified by 35.2% of libraries.  | Service role identified by 50% of libraries.   |
| Preservation roles identified by 6.6% of libraries.  | Preservation roles identified by 44.1% of libraries.  | Preservation roles identified by 71.4% of libraries.   |
| Secondary audiences identified by 13.3% of libraries.  | Secondary audiences identified by 38.2% of libraries.   | Secondary audiences identified by 57.1% of libraries.  |
| External connections identified by 13.3% of libraries.   | External connections identified by 32.3% of libraries.  | External connections identified by 60% of libraries.   |
| Technology roles identified by 16% of libraries.   | Technology roles identified by 23% of libraries.  | Technology roles identified by 50% of libraries  |
| Library as physical place is identified by 10% of the libraries.   | Library as physical place is identified by 26.4% of the libraries. Spaces conducive to learning are identified by 4 libraries.                          | Library as physical place is identified by 50% of the libraries and with the greatest degree of specificity. Spaces conducive to learning are identified by 8 libraries. |
| Library staff are mentioned by 16.6% of libraries.   | Library staff are mentioned by 11.7% of libraries.  | Library staff are mentioned by 46% of libraries and with the most degree of specificity.   |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Social role is identified by 3% of the libraries.                              | Social role is identified by 20.5% of the libraries.                          | Social role is identified by 42.8% of the libraries.                           |
| Future statements made by 16.6% of libraries.                                  | Future statements made by 26.4% of libraries.                                 | Future statements made by 21.4% of libraries.                                  |
| Library's place re the external community is identified by 16.6% of libraries. | Library's place re the external community is identified by 5.8% of libraries. | Library's place re the external community is identified by 21.4% of libraries. |

ries coded in each level of mission statement. Only one macro level library mentioned multiple sub-categories in collections whereas the meso level included 12 libraries and the micro level 16 libraries that identified multiple sub-categories in the collection portions of their mission statements.

Several categories appear to receive similar expressions across the mission statement types. These categories include *service roles*, *future statements*, and the *library's place in the external community*. These three categories received the lowest representation across the entire sample, accounting for no more than 21 percent of all libraries.

## Discussion

The initial analysis of the library mission statements as an aggregated sample illustrates that libraries are complex organizations with many different missions. Of the 16 functional categories derived from the different statements, 5 categories were addressed by a majority of the libraries. These categories represent traditional aspects of librarianship such as instruction and research, access to recourses, and collection development.

The aggregated sample gives an incomplete portrait of how university libraries perceive their missions. A semantic analysis of the terms used in defining collections reveals a marked change in how libraries view collections in terms of traditional paper verses electronic formats. This distinction was not rendered visible by simply looking at the categories taken at face value. The results of the aggregated analysis were viewed quite differently once the functional categories were analyzed in terms of their sub-categories. These differences allowed us to identify three different rhetorical designs that vary in their depth and breadth of categories.

Words are powerful tools. Austin identified illocutionary and perlocutionary forces associated with natural language use and argued that speakers recognize and use these forces to achieve specific and strategic ends.<sup>38</sup> Brophy recognized that the very act of crafting the mis-

sion statement, of having to examine word choices in view of the objectives made visible by these word choices, is perhaps the most important aspect of identifying the mission.<sup>39</sup> This rhetorical work of matching words to goals and aligning the appropriate illocutionary and perlocutionary forces renders underlying assumptions and goals visible.

The macro level, meso level, and micro level library mission statements are the results of rhetorical choices made in part based upon how general or how specific the rhetors wanted these expressions to be. Each rhetorical decision brings with it an associated set of consequences. Macro level mission statements identify what a library is or ought to become in broad or inclusive terms. An advantage in using broad and inclusive language is that groups which should receive service are not passed over or ignored. Another advantage of broad terms is their strategic ambiguity.<sup>40</sup> Institutions that commit for example to serve the "university community" can interpret the referent at any point in time as needed. Identifying information resources or collections in a broad range of formats creates a range of choices that are not determined exclusively by the wording of the mission statement.

Strategic ambiguity carries some risks. The use of broad and perhaps overly inclusive language can be seen as not welcoming because such language lacks a sense of personal connection with individual patrons or groups. Broad terms can become so indeterminate that their perlocutionary force or ability to affect the receivers is lost.

Libraries choosing a micro level approach tend to specify goals using very concrete terms. Little doubt exists as to the audiences targeted for services or what activities constitute collection development. The level of detail featured in micro level mission statements can assist in making claims against the university administration for additional support based upon both library and parent institution's stated goals, help in making purchasing decisions, and in shaping future library initiatives.

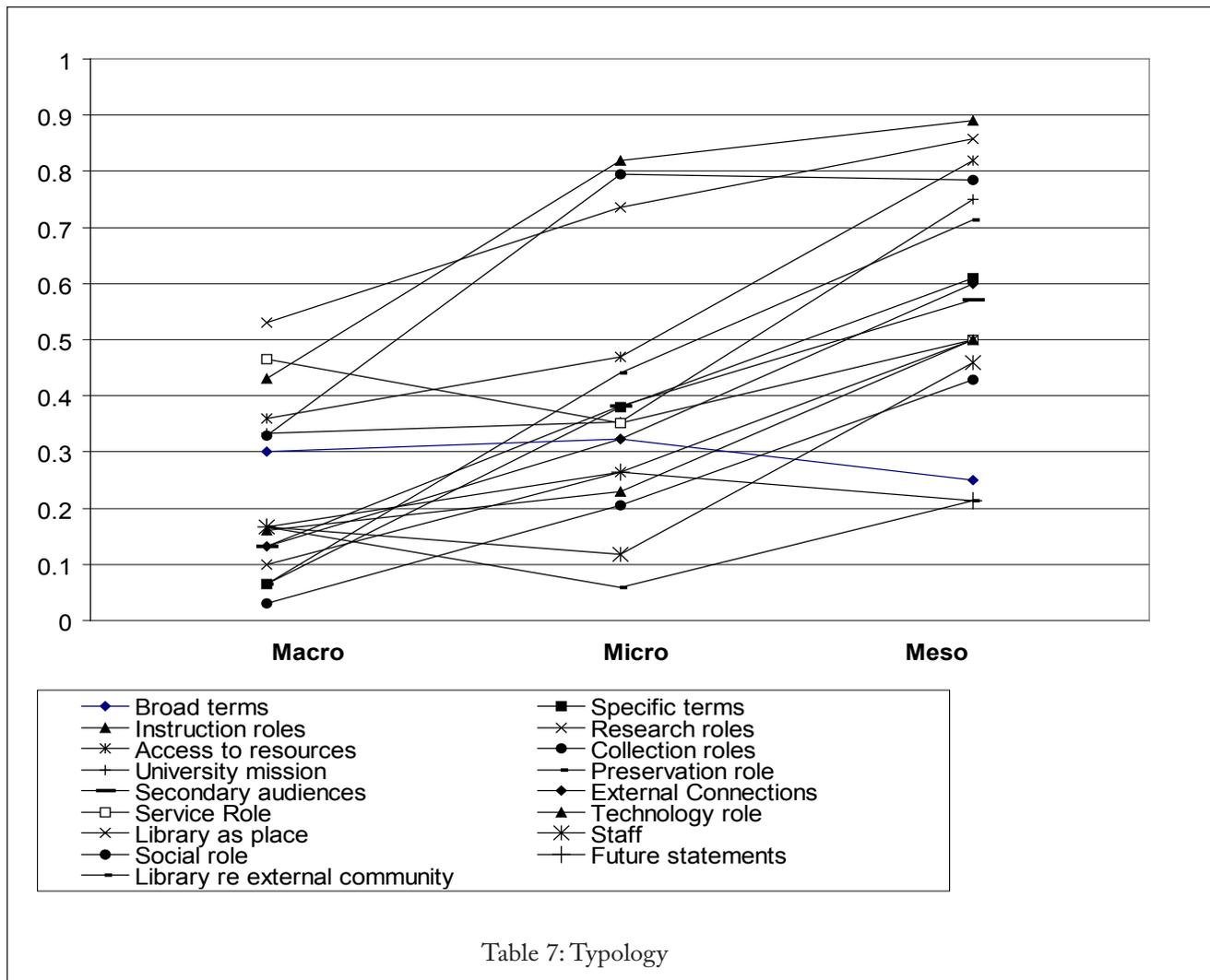


Table 7: Typology

While detailed mission statements have distinct advantages, such detail can become determinate, eliminating institutional “slack” or capacity for alternative actions in the face of competing demands. Libraries using the micro level approach gain the clarity of purpose with the concomitant danger of becoming overly determinate in identifying purposes. Groups or objectives identified in the library’s mission statement hold privileged positions relative to underspecified or non specified groups and/or objectives that compete for library resources.

### Conclusion

Library mission statements are the result of rhetorical choices made on the basis of competing demands and needs. University libraries are faced with similar demands and needs but have multiple rhetorical choices for articulating these demands and needs. Examination of university libraries in the United States reveals three

different mission design logics along with advantages and disadvantages associated with each design. University librarians and administrators need to make principled decisions not only on the words of the statement but on the rhetorical strategies represented by these three types of mission statements. Decisions on levels of specificity should be made as well through identifying information that can be put into goal and vision statements which are more malleable than the organizational expression of purpose.

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**Appendix A**  
**List of all ARL libraries included in this study**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| University of Alabama                      | University of Louisville                    |
| University at Albany, SUNY                 | University of Massachusetts Amherst         |
| University of Arizona                      | Massachusetts Institute of Technology       |
| Arizona State University                   | University of Miami                         |
| Auburn University                          | University of Michigan                      |
| Boston College                             | Michigan State University                   |
| Boston University                          | University of Minnesota                     |
| Brigham Young University                   | University of Missouri-Columbia             |
| Brown University                           | University of Nebraska                      |
| University at Buffalo, SUNY                | University of New Mexico                    |
| University of California-Berkeley          | New York University                         |
| University of California-Davis             | University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill |
| University of California-Irvine            | North Carolina State University             |
| University of California-Los Angeles       | Northwestern University                     |
| University of California-San Diego         | University of Notre Dame                    |
| University of California-Santa Barbara     | Ohio State University                       |
| Case Western Reserve                       | Ohio University                             |
| University of Chicago                      | University of Oklahoma                      |
| University of Cincinnati                   | Oklahoma State University                   |
| University of Colorado at Boulder          | University of Oregon                        |
| Columbia University                        | Pennsylvania State University               |
| University of Connecticut                  | University of Pittsburgh                    |
| Cornell University Library                 | Princeton University                        |
| Dartmouth College Library                  | Purdue University                           |
| University of Delaware                     | Rice University                             |
| Duke University Libraries                  | Rutgers University                          |
| Emory University                           | University of South Carolina                |
| University of Florida                      | University of Southern California           |
| Florida State University                   | Southern Illinois University                |
| George Washington University               | Stonybrook University (SUNY)                |
| Georgetown University                      | Syracuse University                         |
| University of Georgia                      | University of Tennessee                     |
| Georgia Institute of Technology            | University of Tennessee Knoxville           |
| Harvard University                         | University of Texas at Austin               |
| University at Hawaii at Manoa              | Texas A & M University                      |
| University of Houston                      | Texas Tech University                       |
| Howard University                          | Tulane University                           |
| University of Illinois at Chicago          | University of Utah                          |
| University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign | Vanderbilt University                       |
| Indiana University-Bloomington             | Virginia Tech Libraries                     |
| University of Iowa                         | University of Washington                    |
| Iowa State University                      | Washington State University                 |
| John Hopkins University                    | Washington University in Saint Louis        |
| Kent State University                      | Wayne State University                      |
| University of Kentucky                     | University of Wisconsin-Madison             |
| Louisiana State University                 | Yale University                             |

| <b>Appendix B</b><br><b>Functional category definitions</b> |   |
|---|---|
| Primary focus   | Statements that clearly identified which audiences are served by the library  |
| Secondary focus   | Statements that indicate additional audiences that can receive service by the library.  |
| Service role  | Statements that articulate the intent of the library to provide service or that specify a kind of service i.e., outreach or community service.                            |
| Instructional role  | Statements that identify the intent of the library to support instruction, education, or information literacy instruction.  |
| Technological role  | Statements that mention technology directly or identify roles for technology such as knowledge management.  |
| Research role   | Statements that indicate research such as discovery, scholarship, research, and artistic endeavors.   |
| Collection development                                      | Statements that identify building, selecting, acquiring, managing or organizing, delivering material and material in broad ranges of formats.                             |
| Preservation role   | Statements that specifically identify preservation or identify preservation functions such as being a local repository or protecting the most important sources.          |
| Access to resources   | Statements that identified access or described how access should be performed such as effective or efficient links to resources.  |
| Social role   | Statements that identified desired outcomes in users such as life long learning or educated citizens.   |
| Library as physical place                                   | Statements that identified desired or extant qualities of the library's physical environment or how these qualities would support the university's mission.               |
| External connections  | Statements that identify collaborations, consortia, or local, national, or international connections.   |
| Library's position in the community                         | Statements that clearly positioned the library in relationship to the external community such as being a central research library or being the major cultural repository. |
| University mission  | Any statement that clearly identified the university's mission such as the library supporting the university mission of teaching and research.                            |
| Staff statements  | Any statement that mentioned the library staff and or identified attributes of the library staff.   |
| Future statements   | Statements that clearly identified future goals, outcomes, or directions  |