

I'd love to work in a library serving an academic science community. My vision for that setting boils down to two main points.

First is the issue of outreach. These days, we can't afford to sit in our libraries and wait for patrons. Librarians must actively reach out to the academic community and initiate collaborative relationships with community members. If librarians go directly into the labs, offices and classrooms where scientists do their work, our libraries become that much more visible, relevant, and helpful to the community.

Here are a few specific ideas for outreach in an academic science community:

Initiate one-on-one meetings with faculty to discuss everything from collection development to ways to use the library or librarians in their courses. This is especially crucial for new faculty members, who are often overworked and don't have much spare time for dropping by the library. If we can connect with them early in their tenure and demonstrate clear ways to help that will make their lives a little easier, we will have cultivated another library user and ally.

Scientists usually gather for weekly lab group meetings, attended by everyone from the faculty member in charge to postdocs to staff and students. I suggest contacting the faculty member and arranging for a librarian to present at a group meeting. Focus on what the library can do for their group to help them research topics and ultimately publish papers. A subject specialist librarian would be ideal in this situation, but at a minimum the librarian should do some reading about the group's research in order to tailor the discussion to the most appropriate available resources.

We can team up with others in the academic community to offer outreach services. For example, sessions on writing theses and dissertations could be offered to students. This team could include a representative from the registrar's office, a faculty member from the appropriate subject discipline, writing instructors, and a librarian to discuss available resources.

My second main theme is borrowing good ideas from the business world, specifically as related to technology.

Our patrons have growing expectations of the meaning of good service. They expect more self-service options, and they particularly appreciate 24/7 services. We can take some lessons from the corporate world on these points. Granted, these options can be expensive. One way to alleviate the expense is through clever use of technology.

When used wisely, technology can be an incredible timesaver. Academic librarians can help members of the campus community save time by embracing and deploying technologies such as wikis, online tutorials and RSS feeds. These have the enormous advantage of keeping the community up to date on current developments and publications without regard to constraints of time or space. While these solutions will demand initial investment of resources, they can ultimately free librarians to spend more time on higher-level collaborative efforts, thus enabling us to offer a higher level of personal service to our patrons.