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## **Unexpected liaisons: the role of a digital fabrication lab in redefining the library's image**

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### **Keywords:**

Technology, Research, Multidisciplinary, Collaboration, Partnership

### **Introduction**

A digital fabrication lab is not what a typical user expects to find in a library. Yet, as this presentation aims to show, an unconventional service may bring unexpected benefits to the library. New benefits come with new challenges as well, but proactive planning can mitigate the challenges while maximizing the benefits, as this user case demonstrates.

### **Project/service discussion**

A health sciences library at a major academic university began its venture into the exciting world of 3D printing in December, 2014. Seven years later the service has expanded to include multiple 3D printing technologies and materials, 3D design consultations, laser-cutting and 3D scanning. In this session we will describe the experience from the inception of the plan to the present, with emphasis on the unexpected benefits that the unconventional new service brought to the library: new collaborations with various departments and schools, co-authorship in publications, and a niche position in the university's fabrication network that is redefining the library brand. We will describe the quantitative assessment methods through extensive and systematic data-gathering as well as our qualitative methods through user stories and publicity in a variety of media.

### **Conclusion**

Seven years since its inception, the digital fabrication lab offers services that are now considered core services of the library. Despite its success, the operation poses significant questions of sustainability. Library administration needs to constantly re-evaluate its decisions to keep offering most of these services at no cost to its users. The constantly changing landscape of the technologies offered adds an extra level of complexity to the decision making process. The assessment methods in place aim to facilitate these decisions but they also need to be constantly revised and improved to remaining relevant.

## References

N/A