

Report from Melville Library Consultant's visit May 16 – May 18, 2010

We were charged with the task of recommending to the Provost and Interim Dean of Libraries a new organizational structure for library staffing. Prior to our visit to Stony Brook, we were provided with the current library staff organizational chart and background reports and responses to summarized external review observations from September 2009 and one-on-one library staff interviews conducted in the Spring 2010.

In our role as a second round of observers, we confirm all of the observations as reported in documentation provided beforehand. While the Library's budget and its collections were frequent topics of conversation and points of concern during our visit, it is clear that the organizational structure should be revised with an eye towards meeting the missions of the campus through the needs of faculty and students.¹

Our meeting with the newly created Faculty Advisory Committee was very positive and demonstrated the willingness and interest in the campus faculty to assist the library in moving forward. Conversation with this group resonated with items summarized by the External Reviewers from September 2009. Faculty representatives are concerned with how their collections recommendations were actually translated into acquisitions processes and purchases. For them, collection development needs to be a more transparent process. While the faculty was aware of how the insufficient budget historically reduced the Library's ability to build and update the collection, they expressed a desire for the library staff to provide better mechanisms for communicating how to utilize the existing collection and to build stronger relationships with the University's academic mission.

A wish for clearer communication between library staff and the campus was also expressed as a need for overall campus faculty "library awareness." The faculty desire to see the Library as embedded into the teaching process within the campus. Information literacy for the undergraduate population was a keen interest of these representatives, such that they suggested that the current bibliographic instruction activities of the library be expanded and perhaps more closely integrated into the campus curriculum. In a related item, the faculty representatives would also like to see library staff included in academic departmental meetings as a way to improve communications between educators and library staff and more closely align the Library with the research mission of the campus.

Our interaction with the Library's Executive Committee was also positive. Committee members adequately demonstrated an understanding of the various issues that confront them as an organization. We applaud the initial creation of this group and support the principles of representation across the Library's staffing structure established by this committee. The discussion with the Executive Committee revealed that the library staff has not had a comprehensive set of assessment procedures in place to gauge the needs of the campus entities they support. While the staff has collected a variety of statistics for many of its traditional library services and materials, there was little to indicate that there were

¹ MacKenzie Smith of MIT participated as a consultant via teleconference only for the meeting with DoIT representatives and for discussions of overall organizational structure based on MIT Library's recent reorganization.

regular actions to analyze the online services and collections, i.e. library online catalog usage or campus interest in information discovery tools. What mechanisms are in place for the library staff to learn what the various campus stakeholders need? And what public relations and communication systems does the library staff utilize in order to better inform the campus of its resources and services?

Workflow across the library organization was also reported as unclear; some projects appear to have been planned and perhaps completed by building small coalitions of staff. However, as a whole, such projects and coalitions were not conceived within the larger vision or mission of a library serving the campus. We note from both the discussion with the Executive Committee and the written reports that the library staff in general would like to be involved in the change process and to be heard. However, we also note that a certain degree of both transparency and comprehensive staff participation in the change process has been inhibited due to past discrepancies in administrative and professional treatment among the library staff, perhaps due to rank or educational qualifications. The Committee representatives also indicated that there were frequent disconnects between knowledge acquired (perhaps through conference or workshop attendance) and the ability to apply it to actual job tasks or projects. As such, it is not clear what training and cross-training opportunities currently exist for library staff.

Discussions with the Senate Library Services subcommittee revealed another source of campus-wide support for the Library and its future. However, there was some concern expressed as to the relationship between the Senate Library Services charge in comparison with the charge of the Faculty Advisory Committee. As observers, we share the concern noted in the previous external review pertaining to the presence of library staff serving on a campus-wide oversight committee external to the Library's own organizational structure. While it was noted that the number of library staff (3 from Melville and one from the Health Sciences Library) within committee membership was currently due in part to the need to have non-tenured faculty representation on the committee, we wondered if an improved communication system between the library staff and the campus faculty could assist in changing the subcommittee's make-up.

The comments from the Senate Library Services representatives raised several concerns already heard from the Faculty Advisory Committee with respect to the Library's collection and budget. In a related matter, the raised concerns about the off-site collection policy. Was there a cost/benefit analysis of housing off-site materials at a location geographically closer to the campus? Several additional questions directly related to how the library organizational structure facilitates support for its collections and services also arose. For example, how does the Library address the needs of the campus faculty? How do library staff determine what resources are considered crucial both within and across disciplines? What are the services that the library staff builds around those various resources? How does the library staff become more proactive in terms of maintaining both collections and services? Hard sciences faculty noted that there has historically been a shortage of librarians with expertise in hard sciences. It was pointed out that subject expertise among the library staffing structure can assist both professors and graduates in better use of library collections and reference sources, thereby helping to increase the support for future publications and grant funding opportunities.

Analogous to the need for the library staff to identify new assessment standards and tools, we found that the Senate's and campus' reliance on ARL rankings needs to be supplemented with other measurements of library performance and success. The library staff should work with the campus to identify both institutional and library peers to better gauge the development of library services and collections.

It was also indicated that there is a need to breakdown artificial barriers to information access and services between the two campus libraries. This observation was not only mentioned by hard sciences faculty, but also was requested by faculty in the social sciences.

We last met with the representatives from DoIT. We understand that the relationship between the Library and DoIT is a necessary and important relationship. However, we note not only a tension between DoIT and the Library, as mentioned in the original review, but that this relationship is not working well its current form to the direct detriment of faculty and students. For example this relationship hampers the library's ability to manage core library functions reliant on technology. These concerns were echoed by teaching faculty and the Executive Committee. Critical issues include:

- Ownership and administrative control of the Library's Aleph management system
- Ability to innovate and implement new technologies within the library context
- Management and development of the Library's web presence

Recommendations:

Our recommendations related to the Library's organizational structure and operations are based on previous reports and our discussions with the aforementioned groups. In addition, our advice is to create an overall organizational structure that more appropriately meets the mission of the University, is more externally focused, adaptable, and provides greater opportunities for future growth of staffing skills and technological innovations. The library staff should focus on strategic planning initiatives that are broad and establish collaborative support both within and external to the Library. Taken as a whole, we suggest that library staff investigate ways to be more externally facing: attend conferences, use more regular meetings, get beyond the one-to-one contact relationship of department and subject selectors, and seek out partnerships with faculty in teaching and research endeavors. The library staff and the campus also need to make better use of reports and benchmarking in the areas of budget, services, and collections. It will be useful going forward to clearly identify peer institutions both in terms of ARL rankings and levels of innovation in order to establish reasonable assessment milestones that can be routinely referred to across all library operations.

The issue of communication between the library staff and the rest of the campus was a repeated concern in our interviews. While this was typically mentioned in the context of collection development and budget, it also pertained to instructional and research support. Furthermore, faculty indicated that it was hard to identify lines of communication for campus faculty to feed back to the library or its administration.

We are in agreement with the library's staff recommendation for a separate administrative position in the area of collections strategies. The lack of clear communication lines and transparency in the collections budgeting process has led to general assumptions that some fields are receiving preferential treatment in collections support. This administrative position will be responsible for providing a greater level of transparency, administrative oversight, strategic planning required of the collections and the materials budget. There should also be clear collection development and management policies associated with this position. We were informed in our meeting with the Executive Committee that efforts are well underway to improve the collection development policy and acquisitions allocations.

The campus faculty perceives that the Library has been unable to acquire the materials needed for the University's mission. This has led to an environment in which the faculty does not include library resources in the instructional activities of the various programs. It is our observation that even with increased funding and associated relevant collection development, the library staff will still need to inform the campus of the improvements in educational and research offerings, or risk perpetuating the perception that the Library's holdings are still insufficient. It is important for library staff to develop a communication strategy that recognizes the campus faculty as partners in the Library's development. Such a strategy should include a restructuring of public service into instruction and research that is focused externally in accordance with the teaching and research missions of the University. This restructuring should assist in strengthening library support for the development of new campus initiatives whether they be research centers or degree-granting academic programs.

In separating the administration of collection strategy from other administrative lines, we recommend reconfiguring Technical Services to support acquisition and metadata management of all formats within the Library's collections and beyond. The administration of Resource Management will position the Library to have the appropriate skills and structure necessary to support new initiatives across the institution. Staff within the overall structure of Resource Management should be proficient in servicing and processing the various formats found in the current and future library collections.

Decisions regarding systems upgrades and administrative management of core library applications should rest primarily with the Library. We recommend that the two ALEPH data administration positions currently reporting to DoIT, should be pulled back to the Library's reporting structure. At this point, we are not recommending that desktop technology support be pulled back to the Library's oversight. In addition, a revised and public MOU between the Library and DoIT is called for. The MOU should more clearly outline how the relationship and the effected applications will be governed under the MOU, via a joint steering committee.