

Report of the Senate Committee on the Library – AY 2015-2016

Submitted by Gianfranco Vidali, Chair

During the Academic Year 2015-2016, the Senate Committee on the Library held eight meetings. This marked the first academic year of the new Dean of the Syracuse University Libraries, David Seaman. Consequently, most of the Committee work consisted in querying the Dean about the Dean's priorities and plans for the Library. In turn, the Committee informed the Dean of its past work and of its desire to bring the Libraries to a position that reflects the expectations of the SU academic community. The Committee noted that the Dean made of establishing communications with all parts of the University a priority. It cannot be repeated enough that the library is the place that is common to all members of the SU community. It makes sense to involve the whole community in an effort to bring the Syracuse University Libraries to the level it should have for an institution such as ours.

Here is a summary of the major themes that were discussed.

Progress in following the recommendations contained in the Report of the External Review Committee (Fall 2012).

Since the presentation of the Report of the External Review Committee on the Syracuse University Libraries, steps were taken in previous years to address the points raised in the Report; however, there are still critical areas that need immediate attention if the Library is to serve the SU academic community efficiently. They are: staffing, collections, and facilities.

- **Facilities:** the renovation of Carnegie Library is progressing nicely. Bird Library has new furniture on some floors; with the transferring of books and journals to the off-campus storage facility (the Facility), the space in Bird Library is being re-configured to create quiet floors and spaces and improved services for studying and conducting research. Specifically, the second floor of Bird Library is being evaluated with the hope of transforming it into spaces for research and faculty services. Additional improvements in Facilities and Operations are the tagging of books with radiofrequency identifiers (RFID) and extending hours of operation of Bird Library. The Blackstone Charitable Foundation gave funds for creating the Blackstone LaunchPad, an entrepreneurial center on the first floor of Bird Library. On the negative side, the budgeted funds for Operations (Services) are below what is necessary to operate the Library in the current state. Typically, \$400,000 per year needs to be transferred to Operations from other parts of the Libraries' budget. Furthermore, in the near future it is expected that there will be more requests for services and more funds will need to be allocated. How the Libraries can meet these challenges remains an unsolved problem.
- **Staffing:** upon his arrival, the Dean met extensively with librarians in order to identify needs. Because of hiring freezes and VSIP (Voluntary Separation Incentive Program), the Library experienced a severe staff shortfall and the impact on morale that comes with that situation. At the beginning of the current AY, there were 33 positions unfilled. Since then, numerous vacancies were filled, with some in reserve pending the completion of the SU Libraries strategic planning (expected May 2016). Filling those positions and boosting staff morale have been top priorities for the Dean.
- **Collections:** The strengthening of the collection is another area that needed attention. The budget for collections has been stabilized and now accommodates typical yearly increases in online journals and books. As more scholarly work is delivered electronically, the Library is taking steps

in dealing with electronic resources, from copyright issues to preservation of its electronic collection in the event of a publisher going out of business.

- **General:** Still, there is much room for improvement. According to the Association of Research Libraries investment index, Syracuse University Libraries sits in 83rd place among 115 academic research libraries. It is also near the bottom of lists of libraries of academic institutions SU usually likes to compare itself with, including the Colonial Group, the ACC institutions, and private universities of our size. A meaningful advancement would require a substantial (\$4-5 millions) multi-year investment, across its operating, staffing, and collections budget. It is unclear which specific path and resources are needed to bring the Libraries to the level expected for an academic research institution such as SU.

New initiatives

The Committee discussed at length initiatives that the Dean proposed. The two major ones are:

- **A Second Module for the Storage Facility.** One of the bright spots in the Libraries is Special Collections. However, the current facilities in Bird and Belfer Audio Archive are inadequate to provide the controlled environment demanded for the physical preservation of many materials in Special Collections, such as photographic film negatives, films, tapes, fragile manuscripts, etc. The Dean is asking for building and equipping a second module in the off-campus Storage Facility. It will have a digitization lab, appropriate climate-controlled spaces, and cryogenic facilities to preserve fragile items.
- **Open Access.** There is an increased demand nationwide to make scholarly work widely available to the public. Federal agencies are increasingly requiring grantees to have a policy for storing and making available the output (not only papers published in journals, but also data) of federally funded research. An Open Access policy creates a prior right for the institution to retain and publish a copy of the work through its own services. Typically, these policies have automatic waiver processes, allowing faculty to give a waiver for specific articles in journals that prohibit such prior rights clauses. For Open Access to work, it requires expert leadership from the library: there is a need for a framework to deal with copyright, storing and cataloguing manuscripts, and making scholarly work easily searchable and accessible. Curatorial and preservation work is the realm of academic libraries; such service is typically unavailable from publishers. The process of making a scholarly paper available to the repository should be automated as fully technically feasible, and should require little or no effort on the part of the faculty member. The Dean provided examples of Open Access policy that have been put in place at other academic institutions. As former Associate Librarian for Information Management of Dartmouth College, where such Open Access policy was implemented, the Dean is very familiar with the process to formulate and implement such a plan. He plans to begin a conversation with faculty, chairs of departments, and interested parties of other units and centers that have a stake in this initiative.