

**Program Report on the Kutztown University, Rohrbach Library
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Background to the review

In preparation for this review, the external team reviewed documents provided by Dean Darden including the Program Review Committee Report (2008), Accomplishments, Challenges and Visions (March 2008), an extract from the Middle States Report (1998) on the Library and Learning Services, and other material available through the website. Our site visit consisted of a day of meetings, many quite brief, with members of the campus administration, the teaching faculty, Library faculty, Library staff, and students, primarily from the Library staff.

The external review follows a recent Middle States evaluation, from which there is not yet a report that might inform our recommendations, and a program review conducted by a committee of the Library staff and faculty. It also comes at a time when the Dean has been in place for two years, and when a strategic planning process is underway. Within the constraints of our limited one day visit, we make the following observations and recommendations.

Summary Statement

The Kutztown University Rohrbach Library (KURL) is a highly valued campus resource, with a recently appointed, highly committed leader. Dean Darden is collegial in her approach, forward thinking, and committed to making continuous improvements for the betterment of the library and campus. The Library staff and faculty are also well regarded by campus administrators, and by the faculty and students with whom we met.

However, this review illuminated critical issues (some of which were documented a decade ago in the 1998 Middle States Report) which continue to hinder the Library's progress on goals and the ability of the Library to achieve the excellence that it seeks. The transformation of academic libraries into digital, anywhere, anytime libraries has been underway for a number of years. For Rohrbach Library to join this movement may call for more collaboration, different skills and greater use of advanced technologies than currently in place.

Structural Issues

The Library is administratively a flat organization, with ten direct reports to the Dean. The Dean is the sole administrator, with all others in the organization either Library faculty or staff. The current Dean has no back up and, while very capable, faces challenges in managing so many areas and personnel directly while also planning and leading the library into the future. The scope is much too large. While there is much

evidence that the Library staff and faculty have expertise and vision (as one can see in their Information Literacy planning, for example), the implementation of desired changes seems to falter.

As the lone administrator in the Library, the Dean's relationship with the faculty librarians is contractually constrained and limited. For example, the Dean is not permitted to directly observe faculty librarians' instruction, which hampers the assessment and improvement of such central programs as information literacy. The Dean's ability to allocate and assign resources to support strategic priorities, and to inform decision making with data and observation, is critical if the Library is going to move forward and meet its goals.

It is clear that the Dean would operate more effectively if a second administrator were in place; during our visit, this was noted as a priority by campus administration. We would recommend creation of a second-in-command position, perhaps an Assistant Dean title, which would have the authority and responsibility to share the management of any area of the library as delegated by the Dean. This position is key to insuring that a strategic plan is not only put into place, but each continuous improvement project is managed to fruition.

While a major restructuring of the organization seems daunting given the other concerns raised by the Program Review, it is suggested that alternative organizational structures might be considered. For example, could several of the currently disparate functional departments be clustered to form three or four divisions joined by some commonalities of service, function, focus? Efficiencies of operation and use of resources, elimination of redundancies, and improved sense of connection and shared goals might evolve from a differently organized structure.

The Library faculty are for the most part on a nine month schedule; the Library Dean has limited ability to offer summer contracts to some librarians. This schedule not only hinders provision of Library service in the summer, but also eliminates progress on Library improvement projects during the normally slower service months. This needs to be addressed particularly in light of a move to expand faculty research and academic programs in the summer. Inadequate staffing is perceived by many to be the major problem in the library.

In the conversations with Library employees, it was noted that the staff and the librarians are troubled by deep division between their respective cohorts in the organization. This is perhaps inevitable given the imbalance in status and position, which is manifested in everything from access to information, to involvement in the decision making process, to work schedules and calendars. While allusions to concepts like trust, respect, and even "interpersonal conflicts, bullying, and gossip" are not specific enough to hone in on, there is pervasive mistrust and low morale on the part of Library employees, which must be addressed.

Data-based Decision Making

Increasingly, libraries are relying upon relevant and consistent data gathering as foundational to knowing and improving upon their effectiveness and usefulness to their communities. It has been mentioned in the documents provided and in meetings that the statistical foundations of the Library are inadequate. “The same statistics are not available for each year, and they are often in different formats from year to year. What should be counted, how should it be counted, how analyzed, how reported, how implemented....”

Evidence based librarianship is about using data gathered from focus groups, surveys, and other metrics such as circulation, article downloads, lots of internal web metrics and much more. The Rohrbach Library has some good mechanisms in place to connect with and gather information from users – such as annual student focus groups and a suggestion box. However, the careful analysis of information gained, the use of such analyses to improve services and resources, and the feedback to the community about what was learned and how it was used needs to be more systematic and transparent.

It appears that there is also a need to have better web metrics indicating what is used, by whom and how much. Without such information, decisions become best “expert” guesses which are often incorrect. Information and metrics should be gathered from all sources with identity information removed to protect privacy but should be readily available and accessible on the website to the entire KU community.

We suggest that a staff member or librarian (perhaps this is a good role for the proposed new assistant dean) or a task force be charged with regularizing the categories of data to collect, the manner in which data is collected, the periodicity of collection, the format and reporting, and the best way in which analysis is done and conclusions can be drawn from such data.

Collections and Access

The Library has put into place important building blocks for improved access to information by the KU community. Electronic reserves, digital resources, user-initiated ILL, improvements to the Website and exploration of link-resolvers will all respond to what we heard from Deans as a desire for faster migration to a more electronic information environment.

Among the positive changes in the recent past is the participation of this library in the RAPID program for fast delivery of requested articles to users. We applaud this forward step, but are concerned that the staff insistence upon mediation (to assure that the received article is the correct one and readable) undermines the value of unmediated service. For example, a request submitted on a Friday might well be deliverable by Saturday if not sooner; but because all requested materials wait for staff intervention, this 24-hour service would wait until Monday to be reviewed, by which time a backlog further delays delivery. Unless experience has shown that the service is truly unreliable, we suggest removing this staff review and addressing individual problems after they occur, rather than delaying all in anticipation of the few that are at issue.

There remain some critical issues relating to collections and access challenging the Library. Almost half of the collection is still catalogued in the Dewey Decimal System. This is symbolically and actually perhaps the largest impediment to realizing the potential of the Library. We most strongly recommend that this be moved to the forefront of the Library's initiatives; that a plan be developed to assess the remaining work and determine what needs to be done to expedite. This may require consultation with other libraries, such as Dickinson College's, which have undertaken and completed such a conversion in the space of a single summer, or with other library catalog experts. It appears that many problems or anomalies facing the library – odd stack arrangements, for one, making the layout of the collections somewhat incoherent, and student reliance upon the familiar Dewey-classified materials even if they are less current or appropriate – will be addressed when this hurdle is overcome. Should an assistant dean be hired, this project might be a good part of that portfolio.

The Program Review Report reflected concerns with the varying degree of access to collections, based upon material format. Specifically, the students with whom we met, mostly library employees, described the AV Center's closed collection as a large negative. We feel that this model is based on convenience and control for the Library rather than needs, preferences, and behaviors of 21st century learners and teachers. In a closed collection, the user community does not have an opportunity to browse the collection (such as, in this case, the DVDs.) While materials are "secure", and orderly, access is mediated by a staff member at a service point. The AV Center leadership described this closed collection as a less costly and more efficient method to manage the AV materials. Today, fewer and fewer institutions continue to keep their collections of such materials closed. Based upon the sample of students with whom we spoke, and, more compellingly, the shift towards open access to these materials as a national trend, we recommend planning for the migration of this to an open access facility; measures may be taken to secure the collection from theft or incorrect reshelving. If anything is obvious with this Millennial generation, it is that the systems and services should satisfy the student and faculty user community.

Information Literacy

The 1998 Middle States report noted that students' mastery of information techniques was poor and that no program was in place to address this systematically. A 2003 Information Literacy Task Force did an admirable job of identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats surrounding information literacy at KU, and outlining strategies, action steps, and a timeline. The 2008 Program Review, however, commented that the information literacy program is mired in outmoded bibliographic instructional models rather than the proven success strategies of information literacy. It appears that there has not been appreciable progress in the years since the Task Force report.

In our recent discussions with faculty and deans, it was noted that students need better direction on how to access and evaluate resources, and that the librarians play an important role in teaching students these skills. Interestingly, one dean spoke of the importance of teaching students research strategy skills, and said, “I don’t know if the Library does this.” It was suggested by the deans that librarians can work collaboratively with faculty to combat plagiarism on campus. While detection of plagiarism was noted as a need, the Library role is more positively cast as working to raise student awareness of issues relating to academic honesty in both principle and practice. The Library clearly has an important opportunity to play a role in the promotion of undergraduate research at the institution.

The external reviewers met with librarians involved in the information literacy program. Their description of the kind of program they envision was well informed by current practice in the field. However, they noted that the inclusion of information literacy in the general education requirements was voted down by the KU faculty senate, which they took to be a serious blow to their efforts. While this clearly was discouraging, it does not indicate that information literacy is neither needed nor valued on the campus; it should not be construed as an insurmountable impediment to progress in this arena. Future efforts to build support for an information literacy GE requirement among faculty would benefit from a track record of success; if you can demonstrate that information skills are of measurable value to students and support faculty teaching and learning goals, the importance of this will be clear.

It is recommended that information literacy be a central piece in the strategic initiatives going forward. Assessment and documentation of student research skills will strengthen the arguments for campus support and will align teaching faculty with Library faculty in a concerted and coherent effort. Core information literacy skills as well as discipline specific competencies are well articulated in the professional literature and should serve as a starting point for campus conversations on this topic. Some colleges and universities have begun these campaigns with faculty focus groups, discussing their perspectives on student research skills; this moves the conversations beyond the library jargon and into an arena of shared concern among teaching and library faculty. A plan for an integrated, sequenced approach to information literacy instruction, based upon student skills assessment and teaching faculty input, should be developed in consultation with teaching faculty.

IL is the “sine quo non” in the ability of students to be successful in their jobs and graduate work. We recommend that some formalized assessment be administered to develop baseline information about incoming students’ information literacy skills; and that an assessment be used to determine whether graduating seniors can demonstrate critical information skills essential for the workplace or advanced educational endeavors. Whether students come to KU with these skills, gain them through their study and research, learn them from librarians or from the teaching faculty or in formal classes, graduating students should demonstrate at least a minimum standard IL skill level.

One possible tool is the ETS, iSkills assessment, which might be administered to a sample of students. (Students who do well on the the iSkills tests might want to have this

added to their transcripts for graduate schools and potential employers.) This will help to norm KU students to others nationally.

Information Commons

As of this writing, we have not read the full description of the proposed Information Commons but we have heard a little bit about the goals and the Phase 1 pilot, which is already underway. Many, if not most academic libraries are moving toward an information commons as a place where technology and expertise, resources and services come together in support of student learning; but those implementations differ considerably from each other. A well conceived and planned information commons will be a real benefit to the KU students and faculty. For example, the consolidation of service desks and more one-stop-shopping for services from the point of view of the faculty and/or students might be a major benefit. (The library information commons at NJIT combines UIS (University Information Systems), Instructional Technology and Media Services in addition to library services. Future plans include adding the writing and tutoring centers that are now separately located on campus.¹)

It appears that there is staff resistance to the concept and implementation of an information commons. Some have expressed a sense that this is merely a trend, not something needed by or of lasting value to the KU environment. We suggest that this opposition be met directly, rather than dealt with covertly as it seems is the current approach. Perhaps the case has not been made effectively to this critical internal group. Perhaps there needs to be more discussion, more input, more information shared about the goals of the pilot, including anticipation of effects on existing services, structures, and personnel. We suggest that more staff be involved in planning for, implementing, and assessing the pilot. Change is always difficult; it is important that all staff, even those not immediately affected by the changes, be involved as the commons concept moves forward.

Interpersonal Communication

Although there was insufficient time to fully understand, much less analyze the underlying problems, there are serious interpersonal conflicts that need to be addressed. Time and again, in meetings with Library faculty and staff, internal communication was mentioned as a real concern, perhaps the source of the Library's failure to progress satisfactorily on all fronts. This was also noted in the Program Review Report: "The communication between all Library employees, between Library departments, and between the administration and the employees needs to improve."

Some of the problems relating to the communication to Library employees of information about decisions, services, processes, and the like are fostered by the reporting structure of

¹ Please see the article at the end of this pdf newsletter article which describes both information commons and learning commons and has a rather comprehensive bibliography.
<http://www3.baylor.edu/LIRT/lirtnews/2008/mar08.pdf>

the organization, noted above. With each functional area operating as a separate entity, reporting upward to the Dean, the sharing of information laterally among individuals and sections is hampered. Other problems may result from email being a primary means of communication. It is essentially a unilateral mechanism for communication, and even when response is invited, often unintentionally raises more questions than it answers. Yet another area of concern is the absence of a forum for Library employee dialogue; communication, when it exists, is not done in a way that fosters engagement and response. It was noted that communication seems to have declined since the addition to the building was completed. People are farther apart now losing the proximity that, in the past, supported an informal flow of information.

There do not seem to be regular reports from the Dean to the entire staff, about her activities, Library issues, progress on goals, or what is learned from her involvement in campus and university wide endeavors. In the absence of information, rumors and a sense of paranoia and exclusion run rampant. It is not clear what the current meeting structure is in the Library. Staff members mentioned that, in the past, meetings for all library staff took place regularly. It may be time for these to resume.

All of the Library employees with external roles should, when possible and not jeopardizing confidentiality, both represent and communicate from the Library perspective to their committees AND bring back to the Library information that can be used to inform decision making. There also does not appear to be an institutionalized mechanism for groups, teams, task forces, or committees, to regularly report on progress, gather input, and respond to questions about their charges and activities.

We propose that the Library take this communication problem seriously and work, with external help if need be, to develop strong mechanisms for formal and regular communication, as well as vehicles for informal communication; and to seek structural or other changes that will foster a greater sense of ownership, connection, and commitment on the part of a truly excellent staff. Band aids, such as team workshops, are viewed skeptically by the staff as not really bringing core change.

Student and Campus Communications

The Library has developed several means of communicating with the campus community. A newsletter is now produced each semester. Our sense, from conversations with students, is that students will not read this online, so paper versions might extend the readership. It is suggested that the market for the kind of news included in the paper be differentiated – for example, which articles are “need to know” – relating to resources and services; and which are “nice to know” featuring articles about staff members, and Library organization or structures. Segmenting the audience might suggest distributing certain pages or articles in multiple forms so they can be found at point of need. The Library has also launched a blog, and a Facebook account which was noted positively by the students with whom we met.

It was noted that although the Library has a suggestion box, no one knows who handles these suggestions or what happens to them. Perhaps posting the suggestions and helpful

(hopefully witty) responses would demonstrate the Library's user-centric posture and also inform the community. These could be included as messages on a digital signboard, could be posted on the website, and posted somewhere on a bulletin board in the building as well.

The Library makes use of a standing student focus group to inform its efforts; however, it is comprised of student Library workers (as was the group with whom these reviewers met) which perhaps does not provide any insight into the perspectives of the uninitiated typical student. This committee, with the same student members, meets a number of times each year with library staff. Focus groups typically meet only once, are populated with a stratified random sampling, are moderated by a third party facilitator who is not vested with responsibility for the agency being studied, and are asked a number of carefully prepared questions. Focus groups are not statistically valid but are a very good method to obtain new ideas or determine problems and/or potential improvements. Focus groups are about listening to our user community. We recommend that every year, or at least every other year, that the library run separate focus groups of underclassmen, upperclassmen, graduate students and even faculty, with from 10-12 in each. This should be done through an outside facilitator from another department of KU. Students would also be included in regular LibQual or other service satisfaction studies, though less frequently.

The presence of an active teaching Faculty Library Committee is good sign of vigor for KU. It might be useful to broaden the committee to include a representative from every academic department, rather than just each college (as is the case at NJIT.) Individual academic departments can have very different library needs and these should be represented in the decision making process. An alternate means to broaden the faculty perspective is to increase the interaction between the library and the faculty library liaisons (which includes a faculty representative from every academic department) from being only a means for collection development (e.g. ordering of print and non-print materials) to include more comprehensive areas of the library. The liaison model in place at Rohrbach is more limited than that in many institutions, where the benefit of this relationship extends well beyond collection development into research support, information literacy, and programmatic improvement. Dean Darden has been promoting a more holistic interpretation of the liaison role. She had set-up a very successful library liaison committee at her previous library, where activities of liaisons included communicating new library services; soliciting suggestions, ideas, concerns of academic departments; providing immediate feedback to and from the library; representing academic departments at library functions/workshops/training sessions/events; meeting directly with the head of the library and their respective librarian faculty liaisons at least once a semester – in other words a more active means of interaction and participation.

Technology

Several constituents with whom we met noted that there were too few PCs in the library. With the Library a very popular place to study, it is important to come up with a model that acknowledges the expanding student body size and increased activity in the building.

It was mentioned that laptops are available for loan from three places in the library but only one place permits the laptops be loaned for out-of-library use. In a building the size of the Library, it makes sense perhaps to have a single, large pool of laptops governed by consistent loan periods and other rules, to be loaned at one service point. The convenience of “local” laptops on each floor is negated by the need to go to multiple places to find one that is available.

In addition, it was noted that the level of IT support was critical. Libraries now are more typically accessed remotely than on-site. The level of networking for off campus access, and number of up-to-date working computers available for students and the staff in the library are both now vital to the success of the library. The technology infrastructure investment in the library should be proportionate to the student usage.

Conclusions

The Library Program Review Report (2008) refers at length to the recommendations of the Middle States review of 1998. It notes that eight of the twelve recommendations of that review have not been implemented. While these specific recommendations should be viewed in the context of a decade of change in academic libraries, in Rohrbach Library, and at Kutztown University, and may no longer be critical or even relevant, it behooves the organization to take these recommendations seriously and address or dismiss them. It also points to a need for closing the assessment/feedback loop at the library. When input is sought, or gained, or data is captured and preserved, it is incumbent upon the administration to analyze, assess, plan, implement, and report.

From the strategic plan will derive the objectives, goals, tactics and approaches that will shape the future of the Library. How will changes be implemented? How will progress and cost be assessed? How will processes be kept on track? The creation of committees, such as one working on the strategic plan and another devoted to public relations, affords good opportunities for staff and Library faculty to work together across functional areas on projects and programs of import to the Library and campus as a whole. It is important that on such committees and task forces, participation be drawn from across the organization, and that each member have an equal voice. There is an insurmountable status gap between staff and Library faculty; problems attributed to “communication” are in many instances really a reflection of this structural reality. Task forces, committees, and teams outside of the functional structure of the organization can build common values and a sense of shared accomplishment, and often, through the diversity of expertise and perspective represented, build a better product or outcome as well.

Academic libraries have been a high state of constant change over the past two decades. They have become more digital, certainly; more focused on enhancing access and service; and more committed to developing students who are independent, competent, lifelong seekers and users of information. Therefore the skills needed by both professional and paraprofessional library staff are and have been in constant flux; there is a critical need for ongoing staff development and training to equip library staff for

success in the new academic library. Both the individual and the institution have a role to play in assuring that library staff and faculty continue to develop the skills and expertise required to function in this emerging environment. This requires commitment and resources.

It is hoped that, in the strategic planning process currently underway, the Library will identify several key strategic initiatives that speak to its vision and values, and focus efforts, resources, and attention upon them. It is essential that these endeavors are built upon reliable assessment techniques that will identify the extent of the problems and measure the effects of the programmatic approaches.