12 July 2017

Mr Brett Waytuck
University Librarian
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Dear Brett,

Per the Academic Unit Review policy, I am pleased to provide my response to the external reviewers' report following the recent Academic Unit Review (AUR) of the University Library.

First, I wish to thank you and your colleagues in the University Library for undertaking the preparation of the self-study, and for hosting the review team. I also want to thank the external reviewers, Gwen Bird of Simon Fraser University, Kathleen De Long of the University of Alberta, and Normand Charbonneau of Library and Archives Canada, as well as the internal reviewer, Ian Germani of our Department of History, for their helpful, contextualized, and succinct report.

I will respond to it under the headings of People and Leadership; Budget and Fund Development; Collections, User Services, and Copyright; and Archives and Records Management.

People and Leadership

I begin by noting the reviewers' judgement that the University of Regina Library "is well respected provincially and nationally" (p. 19), and their belief that "all recommendations in [the] report are achievable within 1-3 years."

This seems ambitious, especially in the context of further recommendations to develop a new vision, undertake a change management plan, renew relationships with IS to reposition the Library so as to fully address the shift to digital scholarship, and rethink from the ground up the Library's committee structure.

Yet I concur with the reviewers that these things are indeed achievable in the specified timeframe. With strong leadership, a willingness on the part of Library faculty and staff to reframe substantial parts of their mission, and support from other units on campus, the vision for a renewed University Library set out in the report is exciting and compelling.

It is gratifying to see (p. 4) the reviewers' judgement that you, as University Librarian, have "acquired a thorough knowledge of the Library and the University" in the short time you've been with the University, and that they "heard uniformly positive thinks about [your] management style and his leadership to date." The reviewers judge you "a highly capable and well-respected" leader (p. 19). They note the "Library has strong leaders and managers at all levels" (p. 7). Equally gratifying is their observation that a "number of the library staff with whom we met are energetic and impressive professionals who rightfully enjoy excellent reputations from colleagues within and beyond the Library."

At the same time, the reviewers question whether "the entire staff of the library is working toward a common goal or goals … channels of communication between library departments, and between library administration and staff could be improved" (p. 8). They note that "a spirit of teamwork, collaboration, and shared purpose" needs to be built (p. 7). They find that "Library departments and units seem to operate on a very silo-ed basis both within the Library and within the University."

They also report that "some staff (internal and external to the Library) … volunteered comments that seemed to indicate strife and lack of cooperation between departments and groups" (p. 5). Similarly, the reviewers recommend taking "immediate steps to restore healthy working relationships between University IT and Systems staff within the Library" (p. 15) to accomplish its goals and move fully into its rightful role in digital scholarship. I would ask that you and your team consider these observations and recommendations as pressing and in need of immediate attention.

I strongly endorse the reviewers' statement that a "vision and planning exercise that results in letting some activities go and prioritizing others implies that the organization will have to make difficult choices" (p. 7). This observation embodies the challenge facing not just academic libraries, but the academy itself. If current fiscal constraints continue, we will be unable to sustain the current range of activities, and need to determine what will continue and what needs to cease. This implies, as the reviewers recommend, a new Library vision that is "challenging, realistic, and achievable" (p. 8).

Budget and Fund Development

Reflecting their broad experience of the Canadian academic library world, the reviewers note that like "many post-secondary libraries in Canada, the University of Regina Library has been subject to declining levels of budget funding, which has in turn had an impact on collections and staffing" (p. 5). Later in the report, they note (p. 18) that the University "is currently facing serious budget constraints, and … it was clear to us that recommendations to increase the Library's budget would not be realistic." Given the recent and projected fiscal climate in the province, it is unlikely, as the reviewers acknowledge, that "additional major investments in the Library" (p. 5) will be possible in the short term, at least if they depend on traditional sources of funding.

In this context, I very strongly support the recommendation to pursue a program of fund development, with particular focus on alumni, new partnerships, and gifts-in-kind. I also support the recommendation (p. 16) to seek "external funding to support the digitization program through a … focus on donations and crowdfunding."

Collections, User Services, IT, and Copyright

The reviewers say that the Archer stacks are "beyond full" (p. 11), something that has been regularly communicated by Library leadership in recent years. I strongly support their recommendation to "rapidly reduce the footprint of [physical] collections," especially things like "[e]xtensive runs of legacy print periodicals [and] low-use collections of books" (p. 12).

Similarly, I support discussion of their recommendation regarding a shift in the work of liaison librarians, noting that the "current practice at some research libraries is to remove direct selection responsibility from liaison librarians [and appoint] a single dedicated full-time collections librarian" (p. 12). This has already been implemented at the University of Regina, but could be strengthened per the reviewers' observations. Similarly, the recommendations on priorities for liaison work and the provision of central infrastructure for team-based liaison functions make good sense.

As noted at the top of this page, restoring "healthy working relationships" (p. 15) between IS and the University Library needs to be a high priority, in order to address the weakness in emerging technologies identified by employees as part of the SWOT (p. 6).

I concur with the reviewers that the Library's copyright office has been "highly effective" (p. 17) in its work. What is the future of the copyright function, given all the changes on the national landscape and the growth in open educational resources in recent years?

Archives and Records Management

The recommendation to "align the records management program with the University Secretariat" (p. 18) recognizes the critical importance of this work, but has potential staffing implications that will need thorough discussion before changes are made.

Conclusion

There are a number of other recommendations in the report that time prevents me from touching on here. Nonetheless, I reiterate that I find the review as a whole not just helpful but thoroughly contextualized in the realities facing Canadian academic libraries.

I hope you find these reactions to the external reviewers' report helpful, and would be happy to discuss them with you and your University Library colleagues at any time that is convenient.

Sincerely yours,

Thomas Chase
Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

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