

SUBJECT: Reply to Program Review of the University Library System

TO: Internal Unit Review Panel for the libraries of OSU

FROM: Joe Branin, Bruce Johnson, Susan Kroll

DATE: June 1, 2006

The directors of the Moritz, Prior, and OSU Libraries are delighted to have the opportunity to reply. The panel had a difficult task to review three complex libraries and succeeded in bringing attention to critical issues. In general, the directors agree with the report. The statements below offer some explanations, point to some alternative directions, or add information.

#### *Resource Allocation*

The report correctly identifies limited funding as a critical problem for the libraries. Again and again, comparisons with benchmark universities put OSU in the lowest tiers for expenditures for acquisitions and staffing but in the highest for services. Thanks to OhioLink in buying information economically and to creative and flexible use of staff, the libraries have continued to provide a rich information environment for learning, as the report recognizes. Nevertheless, it is difficult to undertake change and make progress when holding the status quo itself is a challenge.

Both the external reviewers and the university panel said that the central services model of budgetary funding is problematic. It separates the libraries from the teaching and research missions by placing the libraries on the same budgetary plane as buildings and grounds. Thus, the libraries do not have the attention they should receive as the heart of the academic mission of the University. We believe this is true, but also must note that the libraries have been historically under funded in comparison to their peers as evidenced by the same findings in the last program review of the libraries of over a decade ago, long before the new budget model was in place.

Rather than debate the place of the libraries or budgetary philosophies, the directors prefer to focus on budgetary outcomes and measures of improvement. Specifically, the directors encourage the University to adopt a funding formula that looks at the percentage of the University budget spent on information resources and compares that against the percentages at benchmark institutions. The Association of Research Libraries reports these statistics yearly. A goal should be that the libraries of OSU continually advance incrementally but regularly in those rankings.

In addition, the University should adopt a funding model that empowers the libraries to decide whether to increase staffing to improve services or to buy new information. Past practice has been pay more for information but not the staffing to provide service. In a complex information environment when users want special attention—as the focus groups revealed—staffing needs to be high quality and in suitable numbers. Relative to our peers, we are particularly weak in staffing levels.

The panel encouraged the libraries to have some departments, whose information needs are robust and whose serials and databases are more expensive, to pay more for information services. While this appears fair and reasonable at first, the directors fear that intensive use of this model fragments the University as a learning community and discourages interdisciplinary effort. How would one department that is paying extra for a journal feel about professors in another department making use of that journal?

In addition, there are some practical obstacles and questions. What exactly does “more expensive” mean? Is it possible for the University to develop a baseline of average information needs that would clearly and convincingly point to those departments that should pay more? How willing would those departments be to pay the libraries? In the past, the directors have known all too well that faculty want more information but expect others to pay for it. Library resources and services work best as a “central good” at the University, and therefore should be adequately funded centrally.

These reservations aside, the directors are interested in working with professors, deans, and chairs in exploring opportunities for better financial support. It is critical that departments assess information needs when hiring new faculty or proposing new directions of research or teaching. Particularly useful was the report’s recommendation that the directors work with departments in finding endowments for subject librarians.

We, like the panel, applaud the University’s commitment to the major and costly renovation the Thompson Library. We want all our library facilities on campus to be first rate, and to help do this, we do need the third module of the book depository built as soon as possible in order to avoid collections over crowding all our campus libraries.

Finally, the report urged the libraries to add more volunteers to supplement library staff. In fact, libraries do use volunteers and are happy to have more. Nevertheless, volunteers are not always satisfactory substitutes for regular staff. Many are not willing to work the hours or evenings and weekends; special expertise and training are needed to fulfill many library responsibilities.

*Twenty-First Century Vision:*

The panel expresses concern that there is not enough integration of the teaching and research responsibilities of OSU into the planning for the Twenty-First Century Library. We welcome the panel’s insights and recommendations on this topic, but we do note that the bulk of our self study, particularly the sections on “areas for improvement,” “challenges and related initiatives,” and “the future,” does describe our plans and many

activities to integrate traditional and new library services and resource with learning and research activities of students and faculty. In considering the future, our self-study did focus largely on the changing research environment from analog to digital and how our libraries and their services are changing.

The directors see the libraries as central to teaching and research and welcome initiatives to more closely engage the classroom and research faculty in planning for the future. This engagement should be at two levels: university-wide and person-to-person.

As stated earlier, librarians need to work with chairs and professors when they hire new faculty or undertake new directions for research that require new or more robust information resources and services. Chairs do so already for space and equipment but not necessarily for library or information technology support needs. In the recent competition for special funds from the Provost for initiatives to attain academic excellence, none of the proposals had any consideration of library resources. This should be a requirement for presenting the proposals.

Librarians at OSU are expected to engage classroom faculty in a continuing dialog about information needs. Many subject librarians maintain websites and provide faculty special notices on new databases and other resources about their research interests. Recently, the OSU Libraries provided special grants to librarians and classroom faculty who partner to make special use of the libraries in teaching. Often, librarians themselves teach courses fully or provide bibliographic lectures at the request of classroom faculty.

At the University level, changes may be necessary. The report recommended a reexamination and reinvigoration of the Council on Library and information Resources. With this recommendation, the directors agree enthusiastically. In its early years, Library Council was so important to the academic mission that even OSU's presidents (William Oxley Thompson, to cite one example) participated as members. For the Council to resume its prominence in University life would serve well to keep the libraries at the center of the academic mission. The Council's membership needs to be expanded in number and include staff representation. Another thought is to encourage the deans, or each cluster of deans, to appoint someone to be the representative for the college's need for information technology and library resources. These representatives could form, or be a part of, the Council on Library and Information Resources.

#### *Organization:*

The report recommended that "Each of the libraries needs to develop a detailed staffing plan and explore appropriate opportunities for cross training and shared positions/services. Development of staffing plans should not be limited to the libraries but should include engagement with the Office of the CIO and the colleges."

The libraries are working closely with the Office of the CIO and have already partnered in several positions. These include positions at the Digital Union, technology support services, the Knowledge Bank project, OSU: Pro, the Leaning Commons, and the

electronic records manager/archivist at the OSU Archives. Several times a year the libraries meet with the CIO and discuss new opportunities for collaboration.

All the library directors welcome more collaboration within the three library systems, especially for positions that would be mutually worthwhile. One idea is for all directors and assistant directors meet regularly to identify opportunities and needs that could be addressed cooperatively.

At the same time, the directors note that detailed staffing plans and collaboration should take place within a budgetary environment that supports new positions. It is expected that one of the outcomes of the review would be stronger financial support for more positions in the libraries.

The report pointed to a need for greater professional development within the libraries. In fact, the libraries expect and encourage librarians and staff to continuously add to their knowledge. Workshops, lecture series, research release time, and support for professional travel and exchanges are available to libraries staff at a very generous level at OSU. In their evaluations, librarians and staff must explain how they have expanded their job knowledge and plan to improve in the next year. Our staff does report that it is difficult to find the time to take advantage of professional development opportunities, a consequence of our low staffing levels.