November 12, 2010

Dear Colleagues,

We want to take this opportunity to thank the Stewarding Excellence @ Illinois University Library and Law Library Team for its diligent work and recommendations. The report was done in a comprehensive manner with broad outreach to affected parties and users of library services. Dean Paula Kaufman submitted a helpful response and many comments received throughout this process reveal the high value placed on the University Library. The University Library is a strength of this campus, one that distinguishes this institution from almost all others. Dean Kaufman began a review process in 2007 which has been guided by goals similar to the current Stewarding Excellence process. As the Project Team noted in its report: “Of all the units on campus, the Library has been most active in assessing its own structure and practices, and the project team commends its leadership for creating a process to insure that this vital campus resource is sustainable into the future.” We compliment Dean Kaufman for her past efforts and continued leadership.

As highlighted by the Project Team, the New Service Model process undertaken by the University Library has been a financial success and should continue in some form. The process has allowed the Library the flexibility to meet significant challenges. During the last three fiscal years, the Library has absorbed reductions of approximately $500,000 in wage allocations for student workers and graduate assistants. Also, the Library was also able to enter into voluntary agreements with Library employees resulting in approximately $770,000 reduction in the Library’s operational budget going forward. Additionally, almost 300,000 volumes of previously “hidden collections” are now accessible to students and scholars through the Library catalog.

The New Service Model process has evolved over the three years since it was initiated, with more targeted outreach now occurring through focus groups and surveys with stakeholders rather than through general “Town Hall” meetings. We think this new approach is effective in obtaining input about needed services from the major constituent groups served by the units under consideration for change. We understand that the examination of units will continue, albeit with fewer libraries reviewed each year. This schedule will allow for important evaluation to proceed while the Library continues to look for opportunities to improve services in an era of declining resources. In addition to the cost savings realized from these evaluations, it would be useful for Dean Kaufman and her staff to develop other assessment measures so the results can be further analyzed.
A number of the other recommendations made by the Project Team either are underway or will begin soon. Efforts to reduce duplications in journal collections have begun. Although some duplication will continue where necessary, this effort will make better use of space resources while maintaining access to the journal literature.

As stated in the report, the University Library uses a locally-enhanced version of the Dewey Decimal Classification System to classify most of its holdings. The process of maintaining this system, training staff to use it, and creating unique classification numbers is time-consuming and expensive. Using the standard Library of Congress Classification System adopted by all other U.S. research libraries will decrease the time delay of getting books on the shelf and reduce costs by allowing the Library to purchase materials “shelf-ready.” The move to the Library of Congress classification system proceeds on a pilot basis in the Literature and Languages Library over the next 12 months. If expected reductions in time delay and costs are demonstrated, the Library will extend the Library of Congress classification system prospectively to all of its collections. The possibility of savings in the amount of $50,000 per year makes this a project that should move forward and be expanded even if there are some initial investments required.

There is promise in external collaborations that have been in place for a long time and some that are newly developing. The University Library continues to partner with other universities and is deepening its partnership with the UIC Library. For example, a new partnership with the Universities of Wisconsin and Minnesota, facilitated by the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), is occurring and a direct partnership with Indiana University is helping provide subject matter support. Librarians from our campus are assisting UIC in Education and Urbana is utilizing a UIC librarian to cover a vacant position.

On campus, the most successful mergers or consolidations have resulted in subject matter expert librarians being embedded within academic units, e.g., GSLIS and Physics. Although this is highly desirable, as Dean Kaufman points out and we agree, it may not be sustainable as a general model, given the number of librarians needed for it to be fully operational; moreover, it may not be the most effective model in all areas. The Surveys libraries are studying consolidations and are seeking the University Library’s experience in merging departmental libraries.

Responding to concerns raised during the College of Law’s accreditation review, the Law Library now functions independently from the University Library. The two libraries continue to engage in cooperative efforts to the benefit of both. Both organizations are to be commended with accomplishing this separation and for continuing to work together collegially to achieve the spirit of the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding. The MOU should be reviewed on a regular basis with a new goal of strengthening existing collaborative efforts and identifying new, mutually beneficial partnerships. We stress the importance of a recommendation made by the Project Team related to external funding for Law Library faculty. The Law Library faculty must pursue external funding as other faculty members, both inside and outside of the University Library, are expected to do.
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Dean Kaufman and her staff are to be congratulated in the area of fundraising as well. The University Library was given an ambitious initial goal of $30 million as part of the Brilliant Futures Campaign and is well on its way of reaching the newly established goal of $45 million. Dean Kaufman has appointed a revenue generation task force which is reviewing and developing proposals, including the ideas outlined in the Project Team’s report. We encourage the Library to identify ways to position itself as a public good that actively engages in advancement, develops synergies with and among units that generate tuition revenues, seeks external funding to support research and innovative service programs and technologies, and seeks to recover costs for premium services where appropriate. We expect regular updates on the progress and recommendations of the task force.

Dean Kaufman should continue to work with staff from Purchasing and University Counsel regarding problems with procurement and licensing. We must remove any internal barriers to making materials and resources widely available and seek legislative relief where appropriate. We also request more guidance from Dean Kaufman on developing processes for identifying spaces that could be converted to new uses and for addressing a long-standing problem for research libraries of collections that are not adequately accessible through bibliographic finding tools, commonly referred to as hidden collections. It is unclear from the report and from the response whether there is a system or process that can generate this kind of information or one that could be created.

The University Library is an example of an organization that has identified priorities and is actively reallocating limited resources to address them. Through the creation of new service delivery models, new partnerships and sources of funds, and the use of existing partnerships for new purposes, change and transformation are occurring. These efforts should continue with a renewed sense of purpose.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Easter                       Richard P. Wheeler
Chancellor and Provost (Interim)         Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (Interim)