Annual Report on the University Committee on Libraries (UCL) for 2011-2012

The University Committee on Libraries consists of fifteen faculty representatives from the various colleges, schools, and centers of the University in addition to two student representatives. The University Librarian, Diane Walker, plus Edmund Edmonds, director of the Kresge Law Library, and Ronald Kraemer, chief information officer at the University, serve as *ex officio* members. In addition, other library staff members regularly participate in committee meetings.

The committee “reviews policies and practices relative to library resources and services and provides oversight of the development of the libraries. Constitutes a principal interface between the campus units responsible for providing information resources and services, and it also serves as a communications link between the libraries and the University community.”

The faculty members are elected on a staggered schedule for three year terms.

This past year, in regular attendance were:
Doug Archer, Gary Bernstein, Randy Coleman, Ed Edmonds, Patrick Gaffney, Barry Keating, Marya Lieberman, Barbara Fick, Stephen Fredman, Barry Keating, Ronald Kraemer, Semion Lyandres, Sabine G. MacCormack, Carol Pilkinton, Neal Ravindra (undergraduate student representative), Jon Schwarz (graduate student representative), Denise Shorey, Larry Taylor, and Diane Walker. The minutes were faithfully recorded and submitted by Ms. Tracey Thomas.

Committee meetings were held once a month, running for approximately an hour and a half. Seven regular full committee meetings occurred this past year plus a number of smaller sub-committee gatherings related to specific topics.

The arrival of Ms. Diane Walker, newly appointed in July 2011 as the Edward H. Arnold University Librarian, brought a fresh perspective to numerous items on the existing agenda of the committee. With clarity of vision and a wealth of professional experience, Diane described her initial intentions to prioritize and implement recommendations emerging from the extensive strategic planning process of 2010-2011.

Ms. Walker set out her broad vision at the first meeting, stressing the integral role of the library as an increasingly central and dynamic factor in Notre Dame’s continued development in both excellent undergraduate education and the growth of outstanding graduate programs, within the rich Catholic intellectual tradition. She emphasized three core concepts for collaborative action across the learning and research community.

First, she emphasized the need to build collections in both print and electronic formats, and to make steady improvements in delivery systems. Secondly, she pointed to the need for significant enhancement of overall services, especially technical and subject expertise provided for faculty and students. Her third area of concentration was the need for positive and creative
redeployment of space within the library, recognizing, in her words, that “library spaces can be powerful and inspiring tools in the pursuit of knowledge and the production of new ideas.”

A hallmark of Ms. Walker’s approach is to invite the various academic units to bring the library into their projects and plans at an early stage so as to enable the library to contribute meaningfully in the realization of these scholarly endeavors. The rapidly changing nature of information sharing, storing, and distribution, which includes issues of technical competence, copyright, and cooperative access to limited financial resources, makes the library an important partner in virtually all areas of learning and research, even as the uses of the library as a physical building may be changing with the wide-spread advent of digital publications.

The appointment of librarians with specific area expertise has been identified as a major need for some time, and the process of acquiring such specialists was advanced this year by the hiring of East Asian and European History specialists.

Several major issues occupied the committee’s attention this past year related to the immediate and eventual plans for the physical renovation of several areas of the Hesburgh Library. Plans were developed to renew the former Current Periodicals room on the first floor of Hesburgh Library in consultation with a number of constituencies, including the UCL. By the end of the year, plans were in place to greatly improve the appeal and the usefulness of this vital space during the summer of 2012.

Other questions dealing with the use of space explored issues such as off-site storage and the shortage of library carrels for graduate students. Many practical suggestions were explored that reflected on successful spatial innovations in libraries at other leading universities.

Student representatives requested that the Hesburgh Library be open 24-hours a day. A careful review was undertaken to assess the potential benefits and liabilities of such an idea. Issues of security as well as cost were discussed, resulting, finally in the decision to extend the hours for the spring semester from the existing 2:00 a.m. closing time to a 3:00 a.m. closing from Sunday through Thursday, and an 11:00 p.m. closing time on Friday and Saturday. At their final meeting of the year, UCL unanimously recommended that the library undertake a year-long trial and measure usage while open 24/5, and that the University administration be requested to take a closer look at the need for study space on campus.

Funding sources for the library’s many operations was not an issue that centrally concerned the committee, although the topic frequently arose in the context of other discussions. For instance, the perennial discontent among many faculty about limited means available for augmenting collections in critical fields was largely off-set this past year by a special one-time grant from the President’s Circle which allowed Ms. Walker to introduce what she called a “Just Say Yes” approach to many reasonable (although perhaps expensive) requests that would otherwise have been relegated to waiting lists. Parts of this grant were also used for the purchase of highly prized rare materials. In this sense, these limited funds have served as “seed money” to
strengthen areas of the library’s holdings that have direct value to specific departments and institutes.

Ed Edmonds, director of the Kresge Law Library, reported on the state of the law school library at each monthly meeting. The recent opening of the new Eck Hall wing enlarged the law school library’s available area. A few problems of water leakage and moisture remain from the large scale renovation.

Both the Kresge and the Hesburgh libraries experienced considerable staff reductions during the year due to the university’s retirement incentive program. The Hesburgh Library saw 18 staff retirements and 3 retired from the Law Library. In accordance with current policies, only half of the funding for these positions was retained in the budget of the respective unit. Both Ms. Walker and Mr. Edmonds noted, however, that they have been able to hire mission-critical staff successfully and the libraries have adjusted job descriptions in ways that combine duties and/or eliminate positions altogether.

A suggestion from within the committee that gained traction over this past year was support for an initiative that would electronically archive conference papers presented by scholars at various Notre Dame academic gatherings. While some collections are eventually published in journals or edited volumes, this process can take months and years, and only affects a small percentage of the total number of presentations that occur at many formal and informal meetings. Discussion of how this would be best accomplished included input from both science and humanities faculty who recognized the need and acknowledged that an open source system, akin to that found at certain other major research centers, could be established with great benefit. The committee recommended that the Library explore implementing such a service, coordinated with the Digital ND initiatives.

The Committee was briefed on the HathiTrust Digital Library, a digital preservation repository that includes over ten million volumes from partner library collections, digitized as part of the Google Books project, the Internet Archive project, or by individual partner libraries. The HathiTrust collection is full-text searchable, and includes about two million volumes in the public domain that may be viewed online. Partner library users can download these public domain titles as complete ebooks. The Notre Dame Libraries became a member in July 2011, and with support from OIT, the repository became available to Notre Dame faculty and students during the 2011-12 academic year.

Finally, the topic of library security was aired, with concerns expressed about the potential risks of the open door library policy which has long been in practice at Notre Dame. After discussion and examining potential options, the consensus remains in favor of allowing free access to the library. Some concern was expressed that while this town/visitor-friendly characteristic of Notre Dame’s approach to the wider learning community is admirable, it may not always be advisable. Library monitors may need additional training and enhanced communication resources in view
of potential problems that have been identified. But freedom of entry and access to the tower represents a positive value, consistent with Notre Dame’s long tradition, and should therefore be maintained as long possible.

Respectfully submitted by Patrick D. Gaffney, C.S.C.
Chairman of UCL (2011-2012)