Annual Report on the activity of the University Committee on Libraries, for the academic year 2010-2011

Submitted to the Academic Council
Attention: Ann Tenbrunsel
April 18, 2011

The University Committee on Libraries, as stipulated by Faculty Handbook, under the Academic Articles, IV: 3 (g) is charged with “review[ing] policies and practices relating to library resources and services and provid[ing] oversight of the development of the libraries. It constitutes a principal interface among the campus units responsible for providing information resources and services, and also serves as a communications link between the libraries and the University community.”

Its membership, as set down in the manual, consists of the director of University Libraries, the director of the Law Library, the chief information officer or his/her designee, plus thirteen (13) elected members drawn from the faculty of Schools and Colleges, plus two student members, chosen by a separate procedure. The elected members serve staggered three year terms.

Membership for this past year, 2010-2011, consisted of the following:

Susan Ohmer, Interim director of University Libraries (ex officio)
Ron Kraemer Office of Information Technology (ex officio)
Edmund Edmonds Law Library (ex officio)
Sabine MacCormack History (at-large, expires '11/12)
Randy Coleman Art, Art History and Design Department (Arts and Letters~Fine Arts, expires '11/12)
Kelly Martin Graduate Student, Civil Engineering and Geological Science (Graduate Student Representative)
Sherri Jones Hesburgh Libraries (expires '10/11)
Patrick Gaffney Anthropology (Arts and Letters~Social Sciences, expires '12/13)
Semion Lyandres History (Humanities, expires '10/11)
Gary Bernstein Electrical Engineering (Engineering, expires '12/13)
Jennifer Mason McAward Law School (Law, expires '10/11)
Andrew Sommese Mathematics Department (at-large, expires '10/11)
A.J. (Andrew) McGauley Undergraduate Student Representative
Laurence R. Taylor Mathematics (Science, expires '10/11)
Barry Keating Finance (Business '10/11)
The committee has met five (5) times over the course of this past academic year and has one further meeting scheduled for early May. A record of the ongoing business of the committee, including minutes of these meetings is available on-line at, http://www.library.nd.edu/ucl/ a web page which is maintained by Michele Wolff, Senior Administrative Assistant to the Director of Hesburgh Library.

Major Topics Considered by the Committee

1. One major topic of interest, spanning several meetings, concerned the hiring of subject specialist librarians. These are persons with expertise in specific scholarly fields who would join the library staff to take over duties that had previously been carried out by general librarians who were responsible for overseeing collections and bibliographic development in several areas, scattered over several floors. The need for acquiring a group of such professionally equipped librarians has long been recognized, and lately the necessary funds for hiring six of them have variously been allocated. At present, the procedures for conducting searches and for hiring stand at various points of completion.

For instance, early in the year, the committee learned that a Classics specialist had just been appointed. Also early in the fall, two other searches were underway, one for an East Asian specialist and the other for a specialist devoted to Latin American material. Still ahead would be the search for a librarian to oversee the European area and after that a specialist in Arabic bibliography. Also, this past summer, 2010, the decision was made to renovate portions of the 12th floor of the Hesburgh Library so as to consolidate the offices of these subject specialists into one area.

The discussion of these hires and prospective hires generated lively exchanges at various points concerning the most effective integration of these subject specialists with existing library practices, with faculty priorities, and with the work of students, especially those dealing extensively with foreign language materials. Comments about ways to encourage capable undergraduates to seek out and use foreign language texts prompted a number of suggestions.

Eventually, a Latin American specialist was hired; the East Asian search failed to produce a competitive candidate, but has been reopened, and with the approval of the
newly appointed University Librarian, the search for a European Studies specialist has been opened.

2. Outreach and enhanced services, especially with respect to electronic resources, also arose as a major matter of business for the committee. At the start of both the fall and the spring semester, for instance, a Mobile Library initiative was introduced, which brought two members of the library staff to the foyer of the Arts and Letters faculty office building, Decio Hall, where they could assist with semester start-up tasks such as information regarding such things as reserve holdings, EReserves, and planning library instruction classes. The increasing shift to EReserves and an expanded use of interlibrary loan points to the importance of facilitating communication and cooperation between the library and these changing needs. The response was quite positive and further gestures in this direction were explored.

Another innovation designed to assist in productive library use was a “Senior Thesis Camp” scheduled to coincide with the fall break. With the growing emphasis on undergraduate research, especially in the College of Arts and Letters, and the enhanced opportunities to acquire funding for such work, the recognition of the role of the library in this process prompted this initiative. Announcements were posted broadly and the response was quite encouraging. The initiative continued during spring break 2011 with a research camp for graduate students. Present plans are to continue this practice next year, while remaining alert for other ways to assist interested students who may lack experience or familiarity with the resources of a university library.

3. The introduction of a new library home page on its web site also arose on the agenda of the library committee. The launch occurred over the Christmas break, but in advance of this onset, a demonstration was presented to the committee which invited feedback and solicited general comments about the design features and plans surrounding its official announcement. This revision of the so-called Catalog Classic format with a Primo product in the Catalog Beta mode includes a number of unobtrusive technical enhancements although overall it strikes the eye as clean and streamlined. The web technicians who presented the demonstration described the rationale for several of the changes, noting as well, the considerable effort that went into testing the results with focus groups and prospective users in a broad range of categories.

Comments from committee members brought a number of points to the surface, including a few perceived shortcomings on the part of the old system which were not altogether resolved in the new. For instance, it turns out the movement between the bibliographic entry and the interlibrary loan page is not yet properly synchronized. But the explanation
that followed noted that the challenge in such a case was not, in fact, a liability of the software design but stemmed from differences in policy at different institutions. Evidently, to overcome such a gap would require, among other things, increased staffing and the development of an enlarged campus-to-campus delivery infrastructure, which is not as easily accomplished as tweaking the technical capabilities.

An extended discussion of the library’s movement toward the acquisition of e-books also accompanied this demonstration and later explorations of greatly improved electronic facilities. For instance, a lively interest in a patron-driven project to acquire e-books for the library has led to a pilot project fund of $50,000 targeting interest in e-books published by university presses. It was also pointed out that advances on several fronts have occurred that continue to change the wider landscape of collections and access. For instance, while on-line serials have been available for some years, it was announced only in the fall of 2010 that e-books will be built into prominent databases, including JSTOR.

In anticipation of still further changes, funds have been allocated for the fall of 2011 to acquire certain e-book packages, with an eye toward examining the cost effectiveness of these offerings. Committee members from different academic fields pointed out a number of variations in this new terrain, including the appearance of certain science textbooks only in an on-line form, a fact which requires constant updating rather than recycling earlier editions.

Aware of the transitional nature of the present moment in the domain of electronic publishing and book distribution generally, the committee addressed with approval the prudent yet enthusiastically forward looking policy of the library in this area, including the accommodation of several significant projects in response to scholarly initiatives in various areas of the university. For instance, a collaborative pilot project between the University Libraries and the University of Notre Dame Press has received President’s Circle funds to begin converting the backlist of the press into e-books suitable for vendor library packages.

Additional President’s Circle funding has enabled the purchase of an important science databases that will enable us to replace older print versions with an online edition. A collection of materials known as the “Sharia Collaboration” grows out of a research initiative based in the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies which will bring in materials related to Muslim/Catholic dialogue. The university’s Asian Studies program has also received a large award to acquire a wide range of resources, including databases, monographs, and journals, to support its programs, with particular attention to China.

The Catholic Portal project represents another major program which includes significant funds for digitalizing a large collection of pamphlets related to American Catholic belief and practice. A total of 27 colleges and universities have formed an alliance to carry out
this conversion program. The award for this project also includes a graduate fellowship with stipend, to assist in the work.

Along similar lines, in late February, 2011, a two day conference was convened at Notre Dame, with the assistance of the Hesburgh Library staff. Billed as the Digital Humanities Forum, and conducted under the leadership of Crivella West and specialists from JSTOR, the sessions brought over 40 attendees from other institutions to the campus, providing an excellent opportunity for learning about relevant new technologies and their uses.

4. The preservation of diverse and often fragile materials remains a central responsibility of libraries, which has led to the consideration of several matters related to this aspect of the Library’s work. In addition to maintaining standard services in this area, two extraordinary acquisitions have been purchased this past year which require added planning and efforts.

The Office of Research conducts an annual competition for grants awarded to proposals that combine library and faculty interests, with funds being used to acquire desired collections in targeted areas. This past year one of the collections purchased contained extensive materials dealing with Byzantine art and history. A portion of the sum awarded in this grant will be dedicated to preservation and related curatorial needs. In addition, the library presented a case for the hiring a graduate student worker to help in these areas, and funds were also allocated for this purpose.

A second, still larger grant from the Office of Research was awarded to a proposal submitted by the English Department, which has enabled the library to acquire a large body of materials in support of the study of modern poetry. This collection includes a substantial volume of unedited drafts, letters, memos, and other primary documents that require specialized cataloging and customized maintenance. Funds to integrate these materials into the library’s special collections also include the hiring of a graduate student assistant.

In a related development, a new graduate fellowship program has now been established which was proposed and discussed by the University Library Committee in the past. This fellowship is available to a graduate student in the humanities or the social sciences with specialized language expertise, who will assist in the cataloging of backlogged materials in the Special Collections unit. Beginning with the spring semester 2011, the first recipient of this award is from the history department, specializing in modern Russian history. He will concentrate attention on books, journals, and papers from the Marshall collection which features many prominent twentieth century public figures.
This enlargement of fellowship opportunities within the library for graduate students remains a priority and represents a point that the interim director continues to pursue with the Dean of the Graduate School in conjunction with other concerned parties.

5. A substantial amount of the committee’s attention this past year was devoted to exploring and articulating the university library’s needs and expectations with respect to Arabic and Islamic studies. Special guests from the relevant departments, including history and Arabic Studies, were invited to take part in these discussions and consultation with other interested parties was also brought into the conversation.

A rough statistical survey of Notre Dame’s library holdings, prepared by a graduate student under the supervision of a committee member, was introduced which compared our holdings in this area with a number of its aspirational peer institutions. The outcome made it clear that the already recognized gaps in these areas are substantial and consistent. Meanwhile Notre Dame has increased faculty hiring and has added numerous course offerings in Arabic, Middle Eastern, and Islamic studies which have, as a result, drawn attention to these shortcomings.

The changing nature of these fields and the voluminous bibliographical material that supports them make it highly inadvisable for Notre Dame to try to replicate the pattern of collections at universities with long established oriental studies programs, often embedded in prestigious institutions attached to major museums. Instead, the emerging plan envisages additions on several fronts to the library which are specifically suited to faculty and student needs, while anticipating a growth and future development. With this in mind, a major priority, long foreseen, is the acquisition of an Arabic/Middle East studies specialist librarian, a goal that now appears to be imminent, pending final budget approval.

Prof. Mahan Mizra of the Classics/Arabic Studies Department, who participated in one of these discussions as an invited guest of the committee, also noted that the Medieval Institute has now allotted a dedicated room on the seventh floor of the library which will serve as a resource base and reference center for Arabic studies materials. The availability of this space for open use represents a major advance and reflects a positive trend in the direction of establishing centers of convergence in the library that are freely available to interested faculty and students.

Prof. Mizra also noted that collections of hundreds of titles of classic Arabic works have been made accessible online, but that the standard technical support needed to successfully configure office computers in order to download this material was not wholly adequate. Here again, the specialized electronic technicians working at the
library could be of great help. Contacts were therefore initiated to address and resolve these practical difficulties.

Particular points about the present requirements and the future needs of Arabic, Islamic and Middle East studies included awareness of expanding interests in theological and religious aspects of these topics. In addition to classical approaches to these fields with attention centered on sacred texts and related commentaries centered largely around doctrinal, legal, and spiritual developments, the contemporary field of ecumenical studies and religious dialogue has lately emerged as a vibrant current in Catholic circles. Notre Dame’s library has a long-standing and close relationship to the large library located at the Tantur Institute in Jerusalem, which is operated under the university’s auspices. Exploring ways to bolster and enhance this relationship remain a mutual interest to both parties.

6. Discussion of library policy concerning gifts, notably contributions of books, also came to the floor during committee meetings this past year. These matters fall under the supervision of Gay Dannelly, the Associate Director for Resources and Collection Services, who was invited to address the committee and to answer questions about recent changes or misperceptions concerning these topics. She outlined the major features of a revision of the Gift Policy that makes clear certain conditions for donations of books to the library. For instance, under law, the library is not permitted to make a monetary assessment of a donation for eventual tax purposes. However, the committee recommended that the library might offer donors a list of professional appraisers in the area who could perform these services.

Another item raised in the discussion of gifts of books concerned the policy on duplicates. It was noted that in some cases the library retains duplicate copies of various titles whereas others are recycled. The current practice is to donate the bulk of these duplicates to Better World Books, a local enterprise that sells used books on line and contributes the profits to literacy programs and under-resourced schools in Africa and Asia. Other duplicates, discards, or unneeded titles are periodically put out and offered for sale at a standing bargain table near the circulation desk. In some cases faculty may need duplicate copies of essential texts to support their courses. The library informed that committee that it has established a fund to purchase such duplicate copies.

Various matters of internal order, efficiency, and security also come to the attention of the committee in various ways. For example, the computer cluster on the eleventh floor that had been operated by the Graduate Student Union, providing them with a nominal revenue, was reviewed and judged to be superfluous. This valuable space was, therefore, allocated for other purposes and the computers were moved to the primary graduate
reading rooms on the 10th floor for use by students there. Adjustments in the distribution of library study carrels also came under discussion. Since the demand for these units outstrips supply, the need to enforce standard policy was reiterated, such as restrictions that forbid faculty with campus offices to occupy carrels. It was also noted that many graduate students tend to shun the library as study space, a tendency that might deserve closer consideration in the future.

The topic of book safety was recognized as problem that continues to affect many areas of the library. Defacement of library resources continues to appear with highly negative consequences. Ways of countering these abuses were discussed, with an emphasis on increasing awareness of the seriousness of the issue among the user population, including enhanced education.

On the matter of general safety within the library, the interim director noted that she has recently established a task force charged to assess the situation and recommend measures to address possible risk factors. In addition to the uniformed monitors who oversee the entry and exit, the library is working together with Phil Johnson, the head of campus security, to address concerns and implement improvements.

One specific issue related to safety that was explored at length looked at the open door policy which has long characterized Notre Dame’s library. Free and open access to the library expresses a posture of welcome to the community at large which is consistent with the university’s attitude toward campus visitors. However, the possibility of instituting a card swipe at the entrance, especially in the evening, was seen as worthy of further thought and consideration.

Later this year, at some point during the summer, when normal classes are not in sessions, Notre Dame’s security personnel are planning to conduct a real-time drill that will involve a staged incident involving the library. This exercise will enable the library staff and first responders to practice security measures under simulated emergency conditions.

7. A final category of general issues consists of a few broad concerns that resonated in many committee meetings, even if they did not appear as explicit agenda items. The two most important of these issues might be called a study in contrasts. On the one hand, it is quite clear that overall the library staff performs their duties at a high level of dedication and effectiveness. The vital services provided by these personnel contribute immensely to the educational mission of the university even as their efforts are frequently taken for granted and pass unnoticed. On the other hand, however, the faculty members of the committee remained deeply aware of the considerable structural deficiencies in the library’s total holdings that, understandably, reflect a history of lagging growth as Notre Dame continues to shift its priorities toward new horizons of
research. The urgent need for significant enhancement of collections in multiple categories (e.g., Europe, Asia, Middle East, Latin America, etc.) and for bringing the corps of specialized librarians up to a new standard was recognized by all and frequently brought up as a prevailing priority in need of being addressed at the highest levels.

At the same time, committee members noted with appreciation that Fr. Jenkins, the Provost, the Development Office, the Office of Research, and other responsible parties have lately made significant strides toward finding the resources needed to advance various concrete proposals designed to transform the library into an institution truly suited to the academic currents that are now defining the university’s enduring commitment to excellence.

Reported by Patrick D. Gaffney, C.S.C.
Chairman, University Committee on Libraries