Library Response to Self-Study External Assessment Report 2010,
Including Faculty Library Impact Study 2009,
Faculty Focus Group Report 2009, and
Student Library Impact Study 2009

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Submitted May 2010

Introduction:

The library received the external review report at about the same time as the data from the fall 2009 faculty and student surveys, and since many of the results and comments overlapped, the responders will use some of the survey data in conjunction with the recommendations of the external reviewer, Mr. Joe Weber to formulate this response. Finally, the librarians will address other results and comments from the surveys and focus group as appropriate.

Background:

- *Self Study* - Northwestern State University librarians began work on the library self-study document in the summer of 2007, with an original target completion date of early 2008. Because of various factors external to the library, the self-study was temporarily put on hold, but was ultimately completed late in 2009. The majority of the document deals with the years 2001-2007, but the compilers added an update to cover the high points of 2008 and 2009.

  The format of the self-study follows standards and guidelines developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Based on this report, the University contracted Mr. Joe Weber, Director of Library Services at Austin Peay State University, as an external reviewer. Mr. Weber conducted an onsite visit on February 7-11, 2010 and submitted his final report on March 22, 2010.

- *Library Impact Study* – During the fall semester of 2009, the library (with the assistance of Ms. Veronica Biscoe of the University Planning and Assessment Office) conducted an impact survey based on the Colorado Library Impact Study of both students and faculty to solicit their input on which services are most used, and most helpful. We decided to use this format rather than a user satisfaction survey because it can give us more concrete data with which to affect change.

  131 out of 369 faculty (35.5%), and 133 out of 8910 students (1.5%) participated in the survey. The faculty response was good; but, unfortunately, a statistically significant number of students did not respond. Therefore, we can only judge trends in student opinion.

Faculty Focus Groups – During the 2009 fall semester, Ms. Biscoe conducted two focus groups of faculty to follow up on information garnered through the survey. The original intent was to also conduct a focus group of students, but she was unable to solicit enough student participants. A total of 9 faculty members participated in these groups.

Overview:

The primary issues raised in all of these assessments are the staffing and funding of the library. The library faculty and staff concur with the findings of the external reviewer as well as the input from the library constituents that severe shortages of both funds and staff have forced the library to compromise both collections and services. Without an infusion of state funds and greater administrative support, this is unlikely to change. In the mean time, the librarians must re-examine services and tailor dwindling resources to meet the expanding needs of library constituents.

Another common theme across these documents is the nearly unanimous praise for library personnel. Virtually all comments about the people who work for the library were complimentary especially those concerning library instruction, interlibrary loan, and the Shreveport Nursing Center library. Even Mr. Weber commented on the miraculously high morale of the library staff considering the pressures of dwindling resources.

Faculty and Staff:

In his comments about the faculty and staff of the library, Mr. Weber remarked that the people who work at the library are among its greatest strengths. He also commented on their flexibility and willingness to take on additional responsibilities to fill in gaps created by unfilled positions.

The library faculty and staff agree with his assessment that there are not enough people to go around. This is substantiated by the fact that Northwestern State University libraries rank 11th out of 11 among peer institutions, thus creating a situation where many tasks are left undone and librarians have little time for professional development. This is a major concern since the library has two tenure track faculty members who must juggle expanding job duties with tenure requirements.

Participants in the library focus group commented on the disconnection between students and the library caused in part by the large amount of information available electronically. The librarians are in complete agreement with this concern and plan to increase efforts to reach out to students who learn electronically and at a distance mainly through online tutorials. Due to staffing, making this a top priority may compromise other services.

Budget:

The library faculty and staff agree with Mr. Weber's assessment of the budget situation. The libraries' dwindling share of the University's total budget jeopardizes accreditation of academic programs, and the inability to keep up with rising costs of print and electronic resources means that the library will continue to fall behind our peers.

Participants in the faculty focus group shared this concern. A lack of sufficient funding can only lead to lack of resources and staff. Many faculty have specific research needs, which are not supported except through Interlibrary Loan. An excessive reliance on ILL is not viable since there is no guarantee of timely delivery of requested material. As the monograph collection ages and the journal collection is reduced, the cost of interlibrary loan will increase until it becomes a much more significant budget expenditure.

To mitigate this shortfall, the library will continue to investigate and utilize alternate funding opportunities e.g. Student Technology grants for the purchase of electronic books, student government funds to buy popular reading material, and a move to more electronic resources that may cost less than their print counterparts. However, these opportunities hinge on the availability of such funding that is not guaranteed. Only a stable, annual funding source can make the expansion of the library holdings possible. Moreover, a well-rounded library collection cannot be built using grants, because these funding resources stipulate both the format and content according to a pre-defined agenda.

Services:

The library faculty and staff agree with Mr. Weber's assessment of the difficulties in providing excellent service to library constituents. NSU libraries faculty and staff strive to provide the best service possible to all library users, unfortunately, because of the current shortage of staff library hours have been reduced and may be reduced more. For example, there is no longer a "true" reference librarian. All of the librarians who work in the reference department have additional duties, which may necessitate being away from the reference room for extended periods. Additionally, the library director made the proposal to the university administration to reduce hours at Watson by closing Serials/Media at 5:00 pm on Wednesdays, and closing the entire library on Saturdays in order to maintain library instruction and other needed services.

Service at the branch libraries has also suffered due to reductions in staff. The Shreveport Nursing Center Library is losing a staff member to retirement at the end of the current fiscal year, and health concerns of library staff in Leesville coupled with the loss of one staff position cause the library there to be closed much more than it should.

While the obvious solution to all of these problems is an infusion of professional and paraprofessional staff, that is not possible in the current budgetary climate.

Because of this, the library faculty and staff are investigating alternatives to provide remote reference and other assistance until such time as staffing can be increased.

The library faculty and staff fully agree with Mr. Weber's recommendation to raise the profile of the library. However, this must be accomplished in such a way as to not require excessive staff time. To that end, Watson library and the Shreveport Nursing Center library received (thanks to the University administration) an iPhone each, which can receive text messages and phone calls from library patrons. This technology will allow librarians to still be available to patrons even if they are not at their physical service point. Since this is a new service, it will take a little time for faculty and students to make full use of it.

The head of reference has also created a Facebook page for the library, which library staff use to publicize events, hours, services, and other items of interest to the University and local communities. Once this takes off, it will provide an excellent opportunity to raise the library's profile with little drain on staff time. Librarians also send out regular messages via a campus distribution group called Messenger to highlight resources, displays, and upcoming events.

Instruction:

Mr. Weber did not directly assess library instruction during his visit, but he did comment on the relative success of our current program. The librarians share his concern about providing distance learners with more opportunities to interact with the library. Without a librarian dedicated to information literacy, this will prove a challenge. However, reference can make some progress on this by devoting time during the summer months to creating online tutorials. This would allow faculty to embed library information into their online courses.

The librarians also note his concern with evaluating library instruction programs. For now, the librarians will need to rely on the faculty and student surveys.

The library instruction program has always received positive feedback from faculty with 57% of respondents to the survey saying that they bring their students to the library for instruction. There were also many positive comments about this program attached to the survey.

On the student survey, there were several comments about the disconnection students see between library instruction and their course work. To help remedy this, the library will begin offering 15 minute short courses covering various database search strategies and library resources in the fall 2010 semester to assist students with their research issues. The librarians will record student attendance and feedback to determine if this is addressing this need. Additionally, the reference librarians will continue to emphasize research consultations for both faculty and students.

<u>Resources:</u>

The library faculty and staff agree with Mr. Weber's assessment that many library collections are strong, especially in historical depth, but that the circulating book collection is aging rapidly. Despite the age of the collection, library patrons checked out more than 50,000 books last year. While the LOUIS consortium provides many useful resources without which the library would not be able to provide the current level of service, there are gaps in coverage and databases NSU faculty need that the library cannot afford to provide for them.

The collection is obviously still of great use to library constituents because the majority indicate that they can find the materials they need to complete their research in the library –

- 71% of faculty agree or strongly agree that they can locate the books they need at the NSU library. 13% disagree or strongly disagree, and 16% have no opinion.

- 62% of students agree or strongly agree that they can locate the books they need at the NSU library. 16% disagree or strongly disagree, and 21% have no opinion.

- 68% of faculty agree or strongly agree that they can locate the print journals they need at the NSU library. 17% disagree or strongly disagree, and 14% have no opinion.

- 75% of students agree or strongly agree that they can locate the print journals they need at the NSU library. 10% disagree or strongly disagree, and 15% have no opinion.

- 88% of faculty agree or strongly agree that they can access the electronic resources they need through the NSU library. 8% disagree or strongly disagree, and 5% have no opinion.

- 85% of students agree or strongly agree that they can access the electronic resources they need through the NSU library. 10% disagree or strongly disagree, and 4% have no opinion.

- 81% of faculty agree or strongly agree that they can get materials they need from other libraries through Interlibrary Loan. 3% disagree or strongly disagree, and 16% have no opinion.

- 49% of students agree or strongly agree that they can get materials they need from other libraries through Interlibrary Loan. 8% disagree or strongly disagree, and 42% have no opinion.

Communication and Cooperation:

The library faculty and staff agree with Mr. Weber's assessment of the effectiveness of the library liaison program. It is a workable model, which can only really be improved by adding additional library faculty so that each of the librarians need not handle so many disparate programs. However, with budget limitations what they are, few librarians are able to devote a lot of time to their liaison activities aside from providing information and basic assistance to their departments.

Mr. Weber was also concerned about the fact that some departments underutilize the library. This is true of both collection use and library instruction. The head of reference will work with other staff to collect data and anecdotal information on which departments are and are not using library services. She will then make the results known to the director and other library liaisons. Liaisons in our "underperforming" departments can then increase efforts to encourage those faculty and students to make better use of library collections and services.

Equipment and Technology:

Mr. Weber's assessment of the technology situation is fairly accurate. Public workstations in the library, including those in the instruction lab, are replaced on a regular basis with student technology money. Staff computers are not. In fact, many library staff are using personal computers that are nearly 10 years old. Although the library computer person is rescuing surplus computers and replacing out dated or non-working computers, the library budget must be expanded to include equipment replacement and maintenance contracts for microform readers and printers.

Facilities:

Problems with the Watson building including leaks and problems with ventilation are well documented and have been reported to the University administration. They are fixable problems but will require capital outlay money to rectify.

Branch Libraries:

Shreveport Nursing Center Library – This facility is relatively new, but still has some issues, especially staffing. There is no separate area for library instruction and little room for growth.

The faculty on both the survey and the focus group report had many good things to say about the Shreveport library, especially the staff. A thorough weeding program can solve the one criticism of too many unneeded and out of date books on the shelves.

Leesville Campus Library – As Mr. Weber points out, this library is severely understaffed. There is no room for growth, and the building has many maintenance issues. Again, these have been well documented and reported.

Assorted Observations by External Reviewer

Library comments following Mr. Weber's observations are preceded by "Note" and serve to provide additional context for his findings.

- The library faculty, staff, and administration are to be commended for creating a comprehensive and well-organized self-study report. I found it to be informative and extremely useful, both in preparing for my site vast and for reviewing the library organization and operation in preparation for writing this report.

- NSU librarians and staff continue to do more with less; however, they will eventually reach a point of diminishing returns where that is no longer possible.

  Note: This point is coming rapidly as more library employees are approaching retirement age and some of the younger employees may look for a less stressful work environment.

- Despite its age and the lack of systematic maintenance, Watson Library is a very good facility that only needs a bit of a facelift. I wish I had a similar building on my campus.

  Note: The problems with HVAC may be improved with the installation of new air handling units—although this may not address the problems with lack of ductwork to take the air where it needs to go. Also, the library director reported leaks and crumbling plaster to the academic vice-president and the head of maintenance.

  As for the Leesville campus library, nothing short of a total remodel will remedy the situation.

- In academic libraries in general, book usage has declined in favor of electronic resources. Books, however, still hold an important place in the research process and in teaching and learning, as evidenced by the concerns expressed by the library council regarding the lack of a budget to purchase new library books. At least some money must be found each year to improve the book collection.

  Note: The five-year plan developed for the self-study calls for a steady increase in the materials budget.

- The self-study reported on the age of the book collection by indicating the average age of books in specific subject areas of the collection. Instead of an average age, a more useful indicator would be the number and percentage of books reported by decade in each subject area.

  Note: In the next self-study, the age of the collection report will be by decade in each subject area.

- Some university regulations or practices are not congruent with good library practices, e.g., charging fines for overdue materials may actually be counterproductive as the use of print resources continues to decline in academic libraries in general; the reluctance of campus police to patrol the Watson Library, particularly at closing time, presents a safety issue for library staff.

  Note: Dr. Lisa Abney, Academic Vice-President, contacted the Vice President of Business Affairs about eliminating library fines. Below is the response:

  > (Email from Daphne Sampite, Sent: Monday, March 22, 2010 8:37 AM To Dr. Lisa Abney cc: Carl Jones; Rita Graves; Cathy Trichel, Subject: RE: Library fines)
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  > The current library fine is approved at $1.00/day. The library feeds fines to student and faculty/staff accounts every week, so there is not an additional cost for NSU to do this because we would be sending out a bill for the students anyway. If this is the only charge on their accounts, the fine would still be more than the cost of the paper and stamp to send it out, so I believe that we do make money off of the fines. I could see where this might be a problem if the library was trying to bill and collect separately.
  >
  > Of course, the lost book charges do make much more money but are part of the restricted fund revenue whereas the library fines are part of the operating fund revenue. So far this year, the operating fund is projected to make approximately $20,000 in library fines.

- Graduate students were more concerned about hours of operation than were other groups I met with. The president of the SGA mentioned the lack of Saturday hours but did not dwell on it; faculty did not mention it at all. In contrast, the graduate class I met with mentioned Saturday and evening hours; however, I am aware that my findings (with a very small sample size) are at odds with the results of the building use study conducted last year.

  Note: The reduction of hours is the result of the university not replacing staff due to attrition. The library director studied use statistics that demonstrated that the library was not used on Saturdays to the extent it was used on the other days. When staff is restored to levels making it possible to maintain a quality level of service, the library director will re-evaluate hours.

- Watson Library appears to be underutilized by some programs, i.e., history, business (there may be others as well, but these are the two that came to light during the site visit). This bears further investigation; e.g., it would be useful to look at book check-out patterns arranged by LC range to determine the comparative frequency of book check-outs, and to determine which programs do or do not take advantage of the library instruction program, and why.

  Note: The library director and head of reference will examine check out patterns by L.C. range to determine if materials in these areas are being circulated as well as gather anecdotal information on which departments are using library instruction. Based on this information, the library liaisons will contact their departments and encourage them to make better use of library collections and services. The library faculty will then report to the library director any changes in communication between departments and the library or use of the collection in specified areas The library director will also take this information to the academic vice president.

Recommendations and Library Response:

Many of the recommendations made by Mr. Weber are identical to the responses made by Dr. Morein in the previous self-study report. The repetition is due to the fact that the library budget and staffing have seriously decreased since the first self-study completed in 2000 and in fact the situation has become worse.

Recommendations

1. *The recommendations made in July 2000 by the previous external evaluator remain relevant today:*

   - It is essential that the Northwestern State University find the funding required to address the needs that have been identified.

   - It is equally essential that the institution begin addressing the problems immediately.

   - The five-year plan outlined in the self-study presents a viable strategy for resolving the problems within a reasonable time frame.

   - If the university truly intends to improve the overall quality and effectiveness of its academic degree programs, it must improve the library by finding the means of resolving the deficiencies and providing adequate, sustained funding.

Response:

The recommendations above are outside the library's control. The university administration must decide on the level of staffing and funding the library should receive and accept the corresponding level of service that is possible with the current conditions.

2. *The university's upper administration should work with the library director and librarians to identify and implement those elements of the five year plan that are feasible and achievable. There is no sense in coming up with such plans if they are to be ignored.*

Response:

Again, the university administration must work with the library director and library staff to create a viable five-year plan that can be implemented in order to improve library services and collections.

3. *Given the current subsistence-level staffing, consider eliminating walk-up reference desk service at Watson Library and move to a model requiring students to schedule appointments. Since students are generally resistant to planning ahead, this will require a cultural shift that will not take root immediately. In the interim, it is imperative that the burden for providing reference services not be shifted to other available staff, e.g., the circulation department, who have their own service desk to operate and who do not have the training or background to provide in-depth reference services. One way this issue might be addressed is to schedule reference librarians to be on call; that is, to be available somewhere in the building, but not actually sitting at the reference desk, so they could be contacted by circulation staff if reference services were necessary.*

Response:

The librarians have already virtually eliminated a walk-up reference service. However, reference librarians (when they are in the building) are "on call" in their offices or through the public address system. In light of this, the librarians must ensure that the burden of providing reference service doesn't fall on other departments, like circulation, that are not qualified to provide reference assistance to users. Librarians encourage patrons to make appointments, and the number of research consultations is rising. However, that is a huge shift in the institutional culture that can only happen over time.

4. *Close the serials-media service desk in Watson Library and deploy staff currently assigned there to areas with greater personnel needs.*

Response:

The library faculty and staff do not find this feasible for several reasons: First, it would shift the burden of service for that area to other parts of the library – patrons will go to the main office or to the Research Center looking for someone to help them. Also, the person who staffs the service desk supervises student workers, assists patrons with microform readers and photocopiers, checks out media material to library users, and helps to deter theft of unbound journals. This last has become of tantamount importance since theft of unbound issues seems to be epidemic.

5. *Campus police should have a greater presence in Watson Library, especially during evening hours and at closing time.*

Response:

The library director has discussed this issue with the Academic Provost and the Assistant to the President and she requested a police presence in the library at closing time. University police requested that the librarian on duty call the police prior to going upstairs to close the building and so far the police have been coming to make sure workers all leave the building safely. The library director has also requested periodic walk-throughs of the building by campus police during our night and weekend hours. So far, this has not happened. The library director will request this again, especially during the final exam week when the library is open to midnight.

Also, on the advice of the Academic Vice-President, the library director asked university faculty and staff to help patrol the library during final exams from ten o'clock and help with closing at midnight. This was implemented during the fall semester.

6. *Increase the number of student employees assigned to the library.*

Response:

The library supervisors send to the library administrative assistant lists of the number of student workers needed each semester. The administrative assistant sends the list to financial aid. It is up to financial aid to supply the requested number of students. For example, for Summer 2010 the administrative assistant was told that the library might receive the same number of student workers as last year or none at all.

7. *Acquire and implement article-linking/serials management software such as CARL Gold Rush; saving the time of researchers and library staff will more than offset the purchase cost.*

Response:

Mr. Weber suggested the purchase of CARL Gold Rush, which is an article linking software. The Serials-Media librarian will investigate whether this is a better option than the LOUIS-supplied LinkSource software. The Serials-Media librarian will make a written report to the library director and the results communicated to the Academic Vice President.

8. *Work to establish a higher profile for the Watson Library within the campus community, and to make the facility a more student-friendly, welcoming place.*

    a. Schedule more activities in the library (e.g., build on the presentations and events already being conducted in the reading room).

Response:

The library director and the library faculty have been very active in scheduling events in the library. The Department of Language and Communication schedules its fall and spring reading events in the library, the new honor society: NSU Eta Mu Chapter of Phi Beta Delta celebrated its first induction ceremony in the Reading Room. In the fall of 2010, the library will host a "Cokes Reward Party" for students, faculty, and staff to show off the magazines purchased by through Coke Rewards. Each semester, the Fleming Thomas lecture series will hold a program in the reading room.

    b. *Continue working to establish a coffee shop in the library.*

The library director will meet with head of Sodexho to investigate the possibility of opening a coffee shop in the library reading room. The library director will report the results of this meeting to the Academic Vice-President.

    c. *Remove the racist and pornographic graffiti in the restrooms.*

Response:

After Mr. Weber pointed this out in his exit review, the library director did a work order to have the men's restrooms painted and the offending graffiti removed. (A student volunteer group had painted the restrooms in October 2009). The janitorial service has been made aware of this, and the library director will periodically check the men's restrooms after hours for a repetition of this problem.

9. *Make another attempt to create a friends of the library group. This can only be accomplished, however, with the full support of the university administration. If possible, it would be highly beneficial if the president were to contact individuals to serve on an implementation steering committee made up of representatives from the faculty, administration, advancement office, student body, alumni, emeriti, and "movers and shakers" within the community. Although time-*

consuming initially, a friends group can contribute to the library's public relations and outreach efforts and assist with town-gown relations, as well as assisting with fundraising.

Response:

The library director agrees with his assessment that the creation of a Friends Group should begin external to the library. That said, the library faculty and staff are unclear just how this group can benefit the library. NSU libraries have no desire to compete with the Natchitoches Parish Library's book sale, and any money raised by a friends group would need to go into a foundation account, not the university's general fund.

Conclusion:

The library director will work the library faculty and staff to follow Mr. Weber's direction and make changes or improvements as recommended. However, the library cannot address the central problems of the shortage of staff and funding. The University administration must address these issues and implement changes as the budget allows.