Academic Program Review Report

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INTRODUCTION

I was honored to be selected to participate in the 2012 Academic Program Review of York College Library. My visit to York College took place on April 18, 2012. Throughout the day, I met with several groups and individuals separately to discuss the York College Library, including the Library faculty and professional staff, clerical staff, students, the Chief Librarian, and the Provost/Senior Vice-President of Academic Affairs.

My report is based on the Self-Study Report prepared by the faculty of the Library, along with my observations and interviews that occurred on April 18, 2012. My report will be framed by some of the principles and performance indicators of 2011 ACRL’s Standard for Libraries in Higher Education.

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

As one of the academic departments at York College, the Library is situated, organizationally, within the Office of Academic Affairs, and, hence, the Chief Librarian reports directly to the Provost/Senior Vice-President of Academic Affairs. The present team of full-time library faculty (9) and staff (8) appear to be a dedicated group of diverse, talented, and qualified individuals who demonstrated that they are committed to fulfilling the library’s mission.

The York College Library has a mission statement, but does not, at present, have a vision statement. I believe a vision statement along with a strategic plan would enable the Library to consider and plan for long and short-term needs of their users as well as respond effectively to improvements of the facility. Periodic assessment of services and use of resources have been done, some with the assistance of the Office of Institutional Research. The results from the recent 2010/2011 satisfaction surveys have proven to be informative and useful for the Self-Study Report. While the annual reports provided a body of evidence that demonstrated expenditures and usage of resources and services, the reports do not articulate very well how the library contributes to student learning, retention, and their academic success.

It was not evident that there was wide dissemination of the Library’s satisfaction survey results and other seminal library-related documents to the York College community. However, these documents were found to be available to the public as they reside on the Library’s Homepage. Except for what was documented at the end of each Annual Report as “Goals and Objectives” for the following academic year, there were no other evident processes in place for ongoing evaluation and improvement of the library services, collections, and programs.

Recommendations:

1) The York College Library must articulate in its annual reports, newsletters and other publications evidence of the Library’s impact on student learning, student retention, and student academic success.
2) The York College Library should attempt to regularly distribute information about library resources and services in as many ways possible to highlight the Library value in the educational mission and institutional effectiveness.

COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION

Internally, the Library communicates regularly with its stakeholders via publications, the library’s homepage, programs, and meetings. The Library is to be commended for its Website, which has a simple and clean interface that is easy to navigate. Publications created by the Library, such as annual reports, surveys, and newsletters, are made available via the library’s homepage. I was also pleased to see that Librarians were active participants in the life of York College. Externally, the Library communicates with the College Community through the YorkTalk listserv, the newsletter PASSWORD, and at meetings where they are as elected or appointed members. In addition, the Senate’s Library Committee meetings are held regularly, and chaired by an external faculty member. The library also has librarians as subject liaisons to various academic departments whose role are primarily for collection development. Aside from these meetings, Librarians are also on college-wide committees either as appointed members or elected members. Their participations on these committees enables them to make the library more visible, network with other faculty and professional staff at the College, as well bring back information of college issues to share with faculty and staff of the department.

Where improvement is needed is in strengthening communications among library faculty and staff to ensure robust exchange of ideas and implementation of goals and objectives. In addition, the absence of using Web 2.0 technologies in 2012 was also of concern. While a wealth of information appears to be exchanged via e-mail, I believe York College Library members would benefit greatly by increasing face-to-face meetings and use of new social networking media. In addition, from the annual list of publications and presentations, the York College Library faculty and professional staff seem to only participate in local conferences. While York College Librarians are engaged in progressive and innovative projects, their contributions to the field remain invisible to the world beyond CUNY. They should be encouraged to publish in scholarly publications and present at professional national conferences.

Recommendations:

1) The Chief Librarian should institute monthly department meetings for faculty and professional staff to increase communication among colleagues in order to efficiently and effectively plan, implement, and execute the Library’s annual goals and objectives.

2) Supervisors of clerical staff at the York College Library should institute monthly or quarterly meetings to communicate new policies, initiatives, and developments at the Library that parallels the need for continuous improvement that may impact their work. Some examples include sharing results of the Surveys and the Self-Study Report and inviting their perspectives and feedback.

3) Librarians and professional staff at York College should be encouraged to publish in refereed or peer-reviewed journals and to present at professional national and international conferences. Professional development activities will aid in promoting their
scholarship, enhance their professional growth, and expand networking opportunities for them.

4) Librarians and professional staff should be encouraged to seek and apply for grants to fund their scholarship as well as attendance and participation at conferences. Several avenues include the CUNY Stewart Travel Fund and the PSC-CUNY Grants.

5) York College Library members should seek opportunities to communicate with the College community, utilizing new and emerging technologies wherever possible. In 2012, most academic libraries use Web 2.0 technologies (i.e. RSS, Chat, Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and other mobile apps) to better communicate with its users, most of whom are digital-born natives.

**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: FINANCIAL**

An examination of the York College Library’s budget revealed that it is made up of several tax-levy and non tax-levy sources, managed by the Chief Librarian. The annual budget allocated to the Library is strictly for materials and support staff. With no financial plan, strategic plan or vision to guide the allocation of resources, the Library expends two-thirds of its budget primarily on print and electronic subscriptions. The remaining funds are then spent on other materials and services that include books, textbooks, microform materials, DVDs, computer workstations, contracts, and office supplies.

The Library is to be commended for:
   (i) seeking out additional funds in the form of grants to supplement its budget for the monograph collection; and
   (ii) joining local and regional consortia for greater cost-effectiveness to expand access to the collections.

However, it is of grave concern to note that the Library’s tax-levy base budget continues to decrease annually, given the significant growing student body, which directly impacts the usage of resources and services of the library. Over the past five years, the total library expenditures have only increased 1.4% (from $634,520 in 2006/2007 to $643,882 in 2010/2011), while the student population has increased 22% (from 6727 in fall 2007 to 8242 in fall 2011). Given the same time span, the Library faculty and staff lines remained stagnant, while the student body increased 14%. Moreover, during the same span of time, the library hours of service decreased 13% from 79 hrs/wk to 68hrs/wk. Three of the five students interviewed (all upperclassmen) mentioned their disappointment in decreased hours during the weekday and the elimination of Sunday hours.

In order for the York College Library to effectively function and carry out their mission in support of the institution’s mission and vision, the annual resource allocation must be restored, and appropriately increased to meet the expanding needs of student and faculty.
Recommendations:

1) Annually in June, the Chief Librarian must provide its direct report with an annual proposal of **budgetary** needs for library materials, equipment, and technology and facility improvements for the following academic year.

2) Annually in June, the Chief Librarian must provide its direct report with an annual proposal of **personnel** needs regarding faculty and staff replacements and/or additions for those on reassignment or sabbatical, family or sick leave, and anticipated new positions for extended hours or new services.

3) York College must provide its Library with adequate funding to support the basic core needs of the undergraduate and graduate programs, including special allocations for programs under review, programs up for accreditation, and new initiatives such as the anticipated School of Pharmacy.

4) York College must provide adequate resource allocation to purchase additional copiers, scanners, computers, and network printers to accommodate the growing body of students using the Library.

**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: STAFFING**

Staffing at York College Library appears to have faced many challenges. Irrespective of these challenges the faculty and staff have worked hard to keep student success as the focus of their daily priorities. Based on my communications with the Chief Librarian and the group interviews I had separately with the faculty and staff, I found similar themes of success and challenges, some of which resonated from the Self-Study Report as well as my observations.

The team of Library faculty and staff strive individually to ensure that the needs of the students are met, and go the extra mile for their patrons. This I surmised from stories faculty and staff recounted regarding challenges, as well as stories from the students interviewed. Given the appropriate resources in staff, York College Library would indeed fully realize its mission in support of the College’s mission as “an educational oasis in Jamaica, Queens.” Successful endeavors include: efforts made to remain visible and current on the institution’s Website – a job accomplished by a faculty member whose primary responsibilities lie in two other areas; trouble-shooting and fixing jams in printers and copiers – a task being done by professionals and paraprofessionals; doubling up of librarians at the reference desk at peak hours during the day; installation of exhibits by faculty and support staff to promote the variety of resources available in the Library; and participating in college-wide events to effectively incorporate library collections and services into education experiences for all stakeholders.

While over the past five years, the Library has received new faculty lines, the number of full-time faculty has remained flat at 10 due to separations and retirements. There has been no increase in faculty lines in spite of the annual increase in number of student enrollment, the increase in library instruction classes, and the increase in in-depth reference interviews with students. The Library’s staffing formula has been evaluated to be adequate in number, however due to absences of several individuals with long-term illnesses and reassigned time without replacements with substitutes or adjuncts, the workload has been burdensome on the remaining
librarians and support staff. The shortage in faculty and staff has also resulted in limited attendance and participation in local, regional, and national professional development activities. A telling sign of the shortage of librarians was that the Evening/Weekend Instruction Librarian was working more daytime hours (80%) than evening and weekend hours.

I note that York College’s Chief Librarian, Njoki Wa-Kinyatti, a tenured associate professor and a 22-year veteran of the library faculty, recently took on the office in fall 2011. While she recognizes present challenges facing the library, she is aware that she needs to be more knowledgeable of the inner workings of the higher education system and has sought assistance from mentors. I applaud her for being open and honest about her abilities and for reaching out to seasoned veterans in the field.

Recommendations:
1) The Chief Librarian should consider a re-organization of staffing for the Library according to the present and future needs of the Library.
2) York College must provide adequate professional, technical, and clerical staff to meet service goals and objectives of the Library, and to ensure that the Library functions successfully in an environment of continuous change.
3) Annual written performance evaluations must be done for each faculty by the Chief Librarian and staff member by their supervisors. The evaluations should include two or three mutually agreed upon goals for the next academic year that relate to the individual’s professional growth and area of responsibilities.
4) The Chief Librarian should advocate for additional funding to support faculty and staff to attend conference and seminars in support of professional development. This includes, but not limited to:
   a. opportunities for the CLT to enhance his/her technical knowledge and skills;
   b. opportunities for the Archivist to acquire the necessary skills to improve physical and virtual access to the archival and special collections material; and
   c. opportunities for clerical staff to attend staff development programs.
5) York College must provide additional lines for full-time faculty who are qualified to ensure access to and maintenance of library resources and services. At present the York Library is in dire need of the following positions:
   a. a Web Services or Digital Services Librarian with the appropriate skills and expertise in web-based development projects such as maintaining a dynamic library website presence, implementing new social networking media (i.e. Chat, FaceBook, and Twitter); and to develop tutorials in hybrid or online courses, etc;
   b. an additional instruction librarian to assist with the demands of providing and integrating information literacy sessions into general education and the majors; and
   c. a full-time support staff (i.e. Gittleson or Assistant to HEO) to assist with the ever-increasing need in Circulation and Inter-Library Loan that require higher level technical and critical thinking skills.
6) York College must invest in its current Chief Librarian by providing her with the opportunity to attend and participate in leadership professional development programs specifically designed for library administrators. Such available programs include:
Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education at Bryn Mawr and the Leadership Institute for Academic Librarian at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: COLLECTION

The York College Library attempts to collect, preserve, and provide access to collections that align with areas of research and curricular needs. As such, it has a sizeable collection of print, electronic, and multimedia resources sufficient on paper for its current student FTE, however the most of its holdings are not update-to-date or relevant as a match to the current curriculum. In addition, the Library’s participation in local and regional consortia has greatly expanded the size of the electronic collection. Collection development, which is done by all librarians, is primarily focused on acquiring electronic books and journal subscriptions as well as books for the Textbook collection, which are heavily used. The remaining collections such as the monograph and microform collections are no longer heavily used due to currency of titles. This is evident in the significant number of titles acquired (borrowed) for patrons at York College via Inter-Library Loan (ILL) and the CUNY Libraries Intra-Campus System (CLICS).

However, due to a decrease in the budget allocation, collection development to support areas of institutional strengths has been difficult to achieve. It was also disheartening to learn from the Self-Study Report, and observe myself, that almost two-thirds of the materials in the York College Archives and Special Collections have yet to be catalogued. Such valuable collections, as I observed, attract a spectrum of interested individuals from the York College community and at-large, and may in turn attract donors for future materials as well as substantial funds to process and preserve current and future collections.

Recommendations:
1) The York College Library should examine its current monograph collection by performing a collection development analysis. This will provide insights to areas of the collection needed to match the curriculum.
2) The York College Library should conduct a thorough review of the relevance and use of the current Serials in print format and Microform Collection. Titles no longer relevant should be immediately cancelled and resources diverted to the purchase of much needed print and electronic monographs, and other newer formats.
3) The York College Library should develop a written Collection Development policy for the acquisition of new materials and gifts. This tool will act as a guide for selecting and evaluating the appropriate information resources in any format for incorporation into the physical or virtual collection. This tool can also be used to exclude gifts that do not match curricular needs or the institutional interest, and hence the library would not be used as a dumping ground for unwanted materials.
4) The York College Library should find ways to provide access to the rich collections currently available in its Archives and Special Collections. Suggestions include cataloguing the various collections in phases and digitizing the collection to expand access to rare items. Grants are available from local and state organizations to assist with digitization projects.
5) The York College Library should explore and invest in exhibit spaces within and outside of the Library to display and promote unique materials available in the Archives and Special Collections. Online exhibits are also encouraged to be developed, once materials in the collections have been digitized.

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND COLLECTIONS

The York College Library collections are accessible to all faculty, staff, students and other appropriate customers via catalogs, databases, lists, research guides, websites and taxonomy. Physically, access to print monographs and serials, DVDs, microform, archival materials, and computer workstations (to access electronic resources and services) are available to 68 hours a week when the library is open. Remote access is available for electronic information resources and services to students and faculty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through a CUNY proxy server. Additional staffing for particular services previously mentioned (i.e. Circulation & Reserves services, Inter-library Loan services, Web services, Technical Support services, etc.) would enable the York College Library to function efficiently and effectively, and would thereby contribute to student learning and their success. It was alarming to discover that the library is not engaged in utilizing web 2.0 technologies to provide access to information resources and services available at York College Library. A large percent of the current student body are digital-born natives and they expect certain technological tools to be available—a criteria to be aware of that fosters retention.

Except for electronic resources and monographs in stacks, all other collections are in closed stacks and inaccessible to patrons when staff are not present. In addition, while there are 120 computer workstations and six copier/scanning machines in the Library, they are insufficient during the day due to the large number of students in queues waiting for an available machine. While the Self Study report noted this, the students interviewed listed additional computer workstations to support their academic success. Tied to access, students also expressed disappointment in the recently reduced library hours by two hours/day during the week days and the elimination of Sunday hours. In their words, this has also “limited access to textbooks and computers” during the aforementioned times.

Recommendations:

1) York College Library should re-examine the library hours of service in order to ensure that access to the appropriate resources and services are provided in support of student retention and success.
2) Additional staffing to support and manage current and emerging library services is necessary to aid the Library in serving all constituents of York College community, efficiently and effectively.
3) In support of student learning, York College Library should conduct a study to identify whether it has a sufficient ratio of computers per student to access research resources and other academic software to support student learning.
LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

The library provides formal instruction in information literacy to over 30% of the students, annually, in spite of the fluctuating number of sessions offered. This is commendable for a limited number of teaching librarians available each year, it proved how dedicated they were to the mission of the Library. The interview with librarians also revealed how committed they were to do their share of educating York College students by making sure they learned the tools and techniques for locating and retrieving the appropriate materials from the appropriate database(s), efficiently and to use the materials ethically.

While the teaching faculty is small in number, information literacy classes which are one-shot sessions are provided for all disciplines, if and when classroom faculty wish to schedule their classes. A recent initiative mentioned was of a librarian embedded in a Physical Education course, all semester long. This initiative takes up a lot of a librarian’s time, and the Chief Librarian should evaluate its value, given the shortage in librarians. I was pleased to see the beginnings of developing research guides that offered valuable information on resources for particular subjects. However, there was no evidence that information literacy sessions or instructional sessions about library services that were informally offered or integrated into other educational services of the institution. In addition, there was no evidence of online tutorials being developed to support instruction services and alleviate some of the teaching workload.

The 2010/2011 library survey revealed that students (82%) and faculty (85%) were pleased with the outcomes of information literacy sessions in support of their research needs. However, without an adequate computer lab to provide hands-on experience, instruction sessions are limited to seating availability and/or availability of other computer labs at given times of the courses.

Recommendations:

1) York College Librarians should explore the creation and development of online video tutorials to supplement information literacy sessions.

2) York College Librarians should explore the utilization of resource management tools for creating subject/research guides. Examples are Brooklyn College’s freely available Subject Resource Management System and the commercial tool, LibGuides, used by most academic and public libraries.

3) York College Librarians should explore the informal instructional sessions for the college community in the form of walk-in workshops (e.g. weekly, monthly). These sessions would fulfill professional development for the community at-large and would strengthen the Library’s mission to being more integrated into the institution’s educational services. Examples of such programs would include workshops of “Finding Health Statistics in Library Databases” (Health Reference & CINAHL databases), “Finding Local Census Data” (CUNY’s InfoShare database), and News You Can Use (Lexis-Nexis database that includes full-text to national newspapers, television transcripts, and legal documents).

4) With the increased emphasis of the importance of information literacy by Middle States Accreditation, York College should explore options to expand or create a computer lab for the Library that will be adequate in all aspects required.
INFORMATION SERVICE PROMOTION

The library offers an appropriate range of information services to support its mission and goals. Annually, these services (i.e. Reference, Electronic Resources, Inter-Library Loan, Instruction, Serials, Archives, etc.) are documented in the Library’s annual report, which are primarily supported by statistical data. I applaud the Library for promoting these services, such as “new electronic resources,” not only on the Library’s Homepage but also integrated into the institution’s homepage. While it appears that these services are monitored, there is little evidence to show how these services are assessed for improvement or elimination. In addition, the absence of the use of new social media tools to promote these services needs to be underscored.

Recommendations:
1) York College Library should evaluate various methods currently used to promote the information services they offer.
2) York College Library should identify one service area to assess, annually. Analysis of the assessment should result in one to three recommendations to improve, modify, merge, or eliminate the service.

FACILITIES AND TECHNOLOGIES

The Library is located within the main academic building that is centrally located on campus, and spans two floors. The entrance to the Library is located on the third floor where all of the service points are located, except for the Archives & Special Collections unit. The Archives & Special Collections, the main stacks, individual study carrels, and public restrooms are located on the second floor. The facilities within the library are pleasantly designed and well-lighted with the exception of a few dimly lit areas. In addition, the cleanliness of the floors and restrooms, as well as the dusting of books and shelves in the main stacks showed signs of longtime neglect of custodial maintenance and attention.

Patrons entering the Library immediately encounter the three primary services heavily used, i.e. Reference, Circulation/Reserves, and Technology Support. The monograph, reserves, and serials stacks were observed to be neatly kept, however the Archives materials were in need of maintenance. Except for one, the professional staff have their own private offices to conduct their daily obligations. The remaining clerical staff have desks that are in shared open spaces. However, it was obvious that office space was limited and space utilization would need to be examined for future growth.

What appeared to be quite spacious during the early morning hours was not the case during mid-morning through late afternoon hours. The library was at capacity, with every computer workstation and study area (on both floors) occupied. It was also observed during this time that patrons were in queues for access to computers, copiers and scanners. Students interviewed expressed their frustrations with the lack of available computer workstations most of the time. The high din of noise during this same time was also an indication that the current library’s space
was insufficient for the number of people in the Library. Group study rooms, though available, were also full of patrons throughout the day. Students interviewed expressed the need for additional group study rooms, but also noted that the same people occupied them throughout the semester. This observation was confirmed by the library faculty noting that there is no system at present in place to reserve or regulate the use of the group study rooms.

While the facility for information literacy sessions is equipped with technological resources, it has seating for only 18 students. This number is insufficient for most classes and, on occasions, other computer labs on campus were reserved for conducting information literacy sessions, to accommodate larger student classes.

Two issues that were of high concern for the faculty and clerical staff were the chronic leaks in the facility and the lack of security presence. Formal requests to the appropriate offices should be made by the Chief Librarian to address each of these concerns; and if no reasonable response, the issues should moved forward to the appropriate higher offices or senate bodies.

**Recommendations:**

1) In support of student learning, York College should conduct a study to identify whether the institution has a sufficient ratio of computers per student in accessible areas, such as open computer labs and the Library. (Case in point: The computer lab situated next to the Library remained unoccupied from 9am to 4pm on April 18, 2012. At the same time, the Library was bursting at the seams full of students, with many students in queues awaiting an available copier/scanner or a computer workstation.)

2) York College Library should explore the acquisition of laptops to help ease the inadequate number of computers.

3) York College Library should explore utilizing Aleph’s reservation module to effectively manage access to Group Study Rooms.

4) If York College’s enrollment continues to increase, the Library’s footprint will need to be renovated or expanded. A space utilization consultant should be hired to examine the facilities in the Library and make recommendations. Suggestion for the short-term would be to explore relocating underutilized materials to an off-site location (i.e. print serials and microform materials) in order to transform the vacated space into high functioning spaces.

5) York College should increase custodial staff assigned to the Library in order to meet the expanding growing body of students who are increasingly making use of the Library. Case in point, on the day I visited, the odor from the public restrooms on the second floor could be detected from the entrance of the Archives & Special Collections unit, which is at the other end of the floor. In addition, while food and beverages are clearly not allowed in the Library, the garbage cans were overflowing with waste.

6) York College should investigate chronic leaks of the building in which the Library is currently situated.

7) York College should invest in public officer presence at the library, either posted at the entrance or patrolling through the Library.
CONCLUSION

Adequate resources, human and financial, are required for a progressive and innovative Library to function effectively with respect to an improved collection, sufficient staffing, and a welcoming and comfortable facility that is conducive to individual and collaborative learning styles. The York College Library has a dedicated group of individuals committed to fulfilling its mission and to enhance student retention and success. However, in order to continue to provide high quality service to York College students, I recommend that the following be done in the short-term:

1) York College Library should develop a multi-year strategic plan that will guide future acquisitions of resources and improvements to the facility.
2) York College should invest in qualified personnel to support the mission of the York College Library. The Chief Librarian should prioritize personnel needs in the multi-year plan.
3) York College Library should set a goal to assess one (1) service point every year.
4) York College Library should evaluate its space utilization in support of current and emerging user needs.
5) York College Library should explore and implement new technological resources to support the effective management and operation of library services (e.g. use of Aleph for group study rooms and the use of Web 2.0 technologies for chat reference, blogs, etc.).
6) York College should invest in auxiliary support staff for the Library, namely Public Safety Officers and additional Custodial Staff. With the ever increasing enrollment, the presence of Public Safety Officers are needed more and more to monitor behavior and maintain decorum in the Library and Custodial Staff are needed to keep up with maintaining cleanliness of the facility.

May 24, 2012