York College Library
External Review

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Introduction

At the invitation of Chief Librarian, Njoki Kinyatti, I conducted an external review of the York College Library, as part of its 2016/17 Academic Program Review. The first part of the review was my site visit to York College on April 20, 2017, during which I met with the Chief Librarian, library faculty and staff, Provost, Information Technology leadership (CIO), students and classroom faculty, and members of the York College Faculty Senate Committee on Library and Technology. In advance of the visit, I was provided the York College Library Self-Study Report (2012-2016) by the York College Library Academic Program Review Committee (April 2017) and the previous library external review report, York College Library: Academic Program Review Report (2012) by Wilma Jones, Ph.D., Chief Librarian at College of Staten Island, CUNY.

The themes and recommendations in this external review report are in these primary areas, which largely cohere with the Library’s Self-Study Report:

- Institutional Effectiveness
- Budget
- Personnel
- Collections
- Public Services
- Space and Facilities

Not all the issues in the Self-Study Report are addressed here; this review underscores high-level issues and themes that were raised during the site visit and which deem further investigation. Where there is no comment, it can be assumed I am in agreement with Self-Study Report findings and recommendations. My analyses of these themes, and my recommendations for each, are grounded in the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Standards for Libraries in Higher Education (2011), and also informed by the University Leadership Council, Education Advisory Board report Redefining the Academic Library: Managing the Migration to Digital Information Services (2011).

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Institutional Effectiveness

The last external review called for a number of improvements in this area, with specific recommendations for communicating the Library’s value to the College’s educational mission and its institutional effectiveness. Consequently, regular communications to the campus community (via online newsletter etc.) were commendably initiated. Notably, direct communications between the Chief Librarian and the Provost, CIO, and President are reportedly excellent; the Chief Librarian’s working relationships with the senior executive team facilitates administrative support for the Library. Nevertheless, communications with students could be strengthened. Also, having a regular online posting of library use data (use of facilities, collections use, reference services, research consultations, instructional data, etc.) that can be used to indicate the impact of the library on student learning and student success would be useful.

Recommendations:

- The Library should work with the Student Government Association to establish a Student Advisory group to the Library, which could provide ongoing feedback to the Library about student needs, and could also allow the Library to more effectively communicate its value to the student community overall.
- A “live” dashboard of key Library usage data (ie. the ACRL data which must be annually reported, but should be continually collected) should be created to display facilities, collections and services use, and instructional demand; such a dashboard could be a LibGuide site that can be prominently featured on the Library’s website.

Budget

Currently, the total budget allocation to the York College Library ranks among the lowest of the senior CUNY colleges, and this is starkly evident when benchmarked against its self-defined peer libraries in CUNY. As of Fall 2015, the York College Library’s expenditures per student (undergraduate and graduate, full and part-time combined) was $172, which places it lower than Medgar Evers College ($209 per student), Staten Island ($210 per student), and Lehman College ($254 per student). Essentially, the overall budget for the Library is the lowest of any CUNY college with senior graduate and undergraduate programs, and it is lesser than a CUNY senior college without any graduate programs. York’s low overall expenditures reflect the library’s budget decline over the last ten years.
with a 22% drop from the previous 5-year period (2007-11) to the last 5 years (2011-16). Given the overall trending decline and low per student expenditures, it is problematic to consider how the Library can support a growing enrollment (with current enrollment over 8000) of undergraduate and graduates with a budget that originally supported a student enrollment of approximately 5,000 students. It is positive that Tech Fee funding has increased 39% over the 2012-16 period, but the steady plunge of 60% of the OTPS funding during the same time period is draconian and undermines the core operations of the Library.

The Library is to be commended for clearly and strongly articulating in its Self-Study Report concrete steps for redressing the budget shortfall.

Recommendations

- Implement the recommendations for Budget in the York College Library Self-Study Report
- To help justify requests for increased and adequate funding for the Library, the Library should comparatively track library expenditures of its peer libraries in CUNY, considering total operating, collections, salary and wages expenditures (professional and support staff) per enrolled student (with possible measures per undergraduate, per undergraduate, part-time and full-time). Such comparisons should be communicated to the Provost, President, the University Dean for Library & Information Resources and other relevant constituents, especially as this data could be helpful in their advocacy for adequate and appropriately commensurate funding for York as a senior college with undergraduate and burgeoning graduate programs.

Collections

Though the overall budget for the Library has been declining over the last decade, the allocations for Collections (print books) has been relatively stable (books comprising 25% of the Library budget over the last 5 years) and electronic resources steadily increasing year over year for 5 years, with the dedicated Tech Fee funds. Serials funding has been trending downward over the last 5 years. The recent termination of the Textbook Funds from CUNY markedly impacts the college’s ability to acquire textbooks for the reserve collection. Strategically planning and tracking total library collection expenditures is hampered by the lack of a dedicated funding line for library collections overall—this has been an issue noted in the last few external reviews. Whether the overall collections trend upward or downward, there needs to be a clear assessment of the use of the print (including in-house use) and e-resource collections, to guide collections decisions going forward. Commendably, the Library is now
focusing on weeding of print and microfilm serials titles. Overall, there is no item-level (by book title, journal title, e-resource title) assessment of the usage of the collection resources, and this stymies informed collections management decision making. Moreover, there appears to be lacking a stated, comprehensive, and well-articulated overall collections development policy for guiding acquisitions and deselection of materials for the main collections, as well as the ancillary Archives and Special Collections. Regarding York’s overall collections development strategies for acquisitions, every effort should be made to leverage consortial CUNY-wide collection development and acquisitions.

**Recommendations:**

- The Library must define a comprehensive collections development policy to guide its acquisitions and deselection processes of all collections in all formats (monographs, journals, databases) for the main library; there should also be a separate collections policy for Archives & Special Collections which defines an appropriate and manageable collection scope.

- There needs to be an ongoing usage assessment (at the item and LC class level, check-out and in-house only counts) to guide decision making regarding collection acquisition retention and deselection of the main library collection in all formats; prioritize deaccessioning of little used “just in case” collections readily available consortially or through resource sharing ILL access.

- Serials library holdings records and other records need triage—there must be accurate records for adequate collection analysis.

- The Library administration should advocate for continued consortial acquisitions with the support of the Office of Library Services (CUNY Central), including investments for shared e-book collections and demand-driven acquisitions (DDA) that support “just in time” acquisitions and short-term loans rather than costly “just in case” purchasing.

- The Library administration should advocate at the CUNY-wide systems level for consortial collections and retention policy among CUNY libraries, to facilitate weeding of titles.

- Establish a Collection Development committee of library faculty (including the ILL librarian) to meet regularly to review acquisition requests (in support of new programs, etc.), renewals and cancellations of resources (journals, databases, etc.), monograph weeding and to consider the availability of consortial resources in all decisions.
**Personnel**

Staffing of the Library is problematic, and subpar compared to the Library’s senior college counterparts. As of Fall 2015, the ratio of York College’s total number of enrolled students to the Library’s staff FTE (librarian faculty and other staff combined) is 370 student/1 staff FTE. By comparison, the ratio of total enrollment to library staff FTE at Medgar Evers is 218:1, College of Staten Island 297:1, Lehman 227:1. The staffing levels at York are not only lower than its self-defined peers in CUNY, the librarian staffing has been trending downwards, and this has been exacerbated by the recent Collective Bargaining Agreement which mandates additional leave for faculty. The compensatory need for faculty leave coverage has not yet been remedied by a commensurate library faculty hire (as prescribed in the new CBA). The bottom line is that the Library is not generally providing a sufficient and appropriate personnel to ensure operational excellence and success to meet basic demands, let alone aspirational services supporting outreach and robust communications to students, emerging technologies, and distance education. This inadequacy is most strikingly apparent in the wide and markedly varying scope of work assigned to library faculty: one librarian is in charge of the Archives and Special Collections and the Circulation/Reserves desk and the Weekend-Evening operations; the librarian who is the Head of Reference is also the High School Librarian; the Head of Acquisitions and Collections development is also the Webmaster. Librarians are also doing clerical/administrative work in the absence of adequate support staff, and relatively costly faculty salaries are being expended on routine clerical tasks, rather than professional/faculty level work.

Given the likelihood for continuing budgetary constraints on establishing new positions, should the opportunity arise to increase staff lines, preference should be given to increasing faculty lines. The request for additional full-time staffing in Circulation/Reserves is questionable given the recent 3-year downward trend in circulation activity, a trend that will continue given that circulation has been in steady decline in academic libraries overall.

Overall, it is to the credit of library faculty and staff that they endeavor to maintain a full suite of services, but this is not sustainable and beneficial for student success. The Library employees are to be especially commended for doing their best to compensate for staffing shortfalls—the faculty and staff are professional, competent, diverse and empowered.

**Recommendations**
• Implement the Staffing recommendations in the Self-Study Report, with the exception of the request for additional full-time staffing for Circulation/Reserves.
• To help justify requests for increased and adequate staffing, the Library should comparatively track library staffing of its peer libraries in CUNY, considering total student enrollment to library staffing ratio (with possible measures per undergraduate, per undergraduate, part-time and full-time), and the % professional librarian staffing to professional and classified staff, and % student assistants to total staff. Such comparisons should be communicated to the Provost, President, and the University Dean for Library & Information Resources, especially as this data could be helpful in their advocacy for adequate and appropriately commensurate funding for York as a senior college with undergraduate and burgeoning graduate programs.
• Consider adding new faculty lines (Outreach, Emerging Technologies, Distance Education librarians) once funding is secured

Public Services

Reference

As noted in the Self-Study Report, Reference is experiencing a decline of total transactions, with a steady decline in "Professional” questions over the last 5 years. This change allows for opportunities in rethinking the staffing and activities of the reference desk.

Recommendations:

• Implement the Self-Study Report recommendations for Reference services
• Given the shortfall of librarian staffing overall, it might be advisable to investigate a tiered-reference service model, with desk staffing primarily by CLTs or student employees who can refer inquiries to librarians off-desk for consultations. This would also free librarians to focus on instruction, an area where there is marked deficiency of adequate librarian staffing.
• Use an online Reference transaction log system (such as Springshare’s RefAnalytics) to record question type (READ scale rating) for question referral and to guide appropriate scheduling by librarians and or non-librarian staff

Circulation & Reserves
The budget cuts and the termination of the Textbook Funds for the library has had marked impacts, as were reported by staff and students during the external review visit. Students and staff reported that the lack of textbooks available in Reserves are a major sore point, and they also endorsed the availability of online resources which would be more available than single copies of print textbooks which would not be subject to time-use limits and fines. Faculty remarked that they would benefit also from integration of library resources into their Blackboard sites for their hybrid/online courses, especially at the graduate levels.

**Recommendations:**

- Implement the recommendations for Circulation and Reserves in the Self-Study Report, with the exception of the request for additional full-time staffing (see “Personnel” section above).
- Investigate the availability of e-textbooks from publisher vendors such as Coursera, Pearson etc. that could be made available to multiple users instead of single print textbooks; this could be an area possibly supported by the Tech Fee
- Promote to faculty the integration of licensed library e-resources into Blackboard course sites

**Interlibrary Loan**

Even though this service is trending downwards, its use by faculty and students could possibly be made more efficient and strengthened through leveraging consortial ILL resources (the IDS Project available to CUNY Libraries [http://idsproject.org/about/aboutus.aspx](http://idsproject.org/about/aboutus.aspx)); City, Baruch, Hunter, Bronx CC, LaGuardia CC are members. Also, with the growth of specialized STEM graduate programs, conceivably there will be need for the Library to make available costly STEM resources not available in the York College Library or in the CUNY Library system—Interlibrary loan will thus be a critical service supporting academic success for those masters level programs.

**Recommendations:**

- Implement the Self-Study recommendations for Interlibrary Loan
- Investigate membership in the IDS Project (which provides no-cost and rapid delivery of articles from member New York State Libraries, and provides training and support for ILL practitioners)
Computers and Technology

Of all the areas in the Library, computers and technology are apparently well supported, and communications between the Library and IT are functioning well, with the minor exception of the reported lack of communications about systems-wide changes affecting students and staff. The co-location of IT staff in the library is commendable, and in sync with best practices for Library and IT help integration at point-of-need. The primary concerns raised by students and staff were the lack of availability of certain kinds of software on the library desktops (software only available in other labs with restricted hours) and the lack of outlets; library staff and students also noted the need for newer laptops, which is being remedied by the IT department with 20+ Surface tablets.

Recommendations:

- Software required for use in courses, such as Adobe, should be loaded in the Library machines, since the Library is the de facto information commons for the College.
- Ensure that IT communications about enterprise-wide updates of software and IT service are communicated to library users and staff.

Instruction

The Library’s Instruction program is one of the major strengths of the Library--this strength is evident in the extensive promotion of information literacy offerings, and the notable reach of the program, with approximately 3000-4000 participants annually attending information literacy sessions in the last 5 years. It is laudable that the Library now has a dedicated Information Literacy classroom—this is a testament to the value the College places on the educational role the Library provides; it is also clear evidence of the Chief Librarian’s strong advocacy for core elements in the Library’s excellent mission and vision statements, information literacy instruction and user education. The number of information literacy class sessions and the number students receiving instruction has been however diminishing over the last 3 years; this could possibly reflect the lack of librarian staffing to provide instruction sessions, or other factors beyond need for greater promotion. The recent hiring of a science librarian who is now providing information literacy classes for science/graduate programs may result in an increase for instructional offerings. The Self-Study recommendation for an assessment of information literacy offerings by department could further illuminate this trend.

Recommendations:

- Implement the Self-Study recommendations for Instruction
- Assess possible multiple factors leading to the recent decline of information literacy offerings
Space

Commendably, the College has supported improvements to the library space since 2011, to improve the Library as study and research environment. Improvement in the library’s physical space—specifically the furnishings (comfortable new chairs) were appreciated by student respondents. The support for space renovations in the library strongly indicates the value the College (administration and students) place on the York Library as a “place for space”—the Library is the place where students and faculty can interact with ideas, collaborate, discover and create new knowledge in a physical and digital environment that enhances learning and scholarship. As noted in the Library’s Self-Study report, and echoed by faculty respondents, further developing the Library as the intellectual commons for graduate students (with appropriate smart labs, and digital showcasing of student research) is a priority. The Library is to be commended for pro-actively identifying collections for deaccession (just as the microfilm collections of national newspapers and print journals are duplicated online) which opens up possibilities for space reclamation to support learning and facilitate collaboration and the creation of new knowledge (group study rooms), as well as for individual study. The group study rooms are prime areas for inclusion of up-to-date technology supporting collaborative learning. The creation of more open spaces with seating and group study rooms has however introduced more noise in the library, which was noted by students, staff, and faculty; to abate noise, students, staff, and faculty all noted the need for enhanced monitoring by public safety officers; lastly, the lack of outlets in the library spaces was repeatedly raised. Access to the Library—convenient hours—is of high-concern for students, especially working adults who would prefer the Library be open on Sundays through the semester.

It was unclear whether there is a phased renovation plan, with user input, to guide ongoing Library renovations, especially considering the user issues raised; it appears that renovations were done opportunistically and ad hoc. A master plan for the Library could be a resource that could communicate the value of the Library to potential external funders (NY state, corporate, foundation, alumni etc.) for library facilities capital projects (smart labs for graduate students, “named spaces” etc.)

Recommendations:

• Work with College campus planning and facilities staff, IT and campus constituents (library faculty and staff, classroom faculty, student government association) to create a library master plan to guide future renovations
• To prepare for any further renovations planning, the Library should assess ongoing seating usage (by type of seating) and seating capacity, in addition to gate count data. Anecdotal information about library space use is not sufficient.

• Implement the Facilities recommendations in the Self-Study report (all of which address immediate needs)

• Work with IT to upgrade the group study rooms with technology and equipment for enhanced collaboration and learning (e.g. Mediascape-type multimedia stations, whiteboards, writeable walls etc.), and to ensure implementation of an automated room reservation system to regulate room use

• Increase security staffing of the library to monitor and control noise issues, and to maintain general safety in the Library; ensure adequate custodial staff to service; consider immediate design solutions for noise abatement (acoustic paneling)

• Ensure convenient hours for access to Library—consider opening on Sundays through the semester

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**Conclusion**

The Library, under Chief Librarian Njoki Kinyatti’s leadership, is to be highly commended for making significant progress and improvements since the last Academic Program Review (2012). The most tangible evidence of such positive change since the last review are the library space renovations supporting the library’s information literacy program, and overall space and facilities needs supporting group and individual study. The Library should fully own and embrace its growing value as a “place for space”—a space for collaboration in support of teaching and learning, as well as a space for quiet study. The Chief Librarian has good communications with the President, Provost, and CIO, all of which are exceedingly important for advancing the case for supporting adequate budgeting and staffing for the York College Library. Overall budget and staffing levels are the primary challenges which the Library faces, as York becomes a senior CUNY college with truly distinctive and growing graduate programs in STEM. To support such distinction, the Library must be supported all around—not just for capital projects but for collections, services, and staffing contributing to student and faculty academic success. The 5-year Program Review provides an excellent opportunity for the Library to articulate a 5-year strategic plan which can help it allocate resources, human and financial, in times of continuing funding constraints.