Transylvania University Library
An Assessment

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Introduction

This report is the result of my day-and-a-half visit to the Transylvania University campus and several hours of preparation reading documents and reviewing the library web site. The visit to campus was for the purpose of preparing an assessment of the library which occurs about every ten years.

The visit was a delight aided by the hospitality of everyone I met. Their commitment to Transylvania was noteworthy. And the fine spring weather that Lexington experienced on those two days added to the pleasure of the visit.

As is detailed in the report—a response to eight questions posed by Susan Brown—the Transylvania Library is in good standing. While some challenges need to be addressed, I found that the basics of the library—services, facilities, staff and collections— are in good order. The library is highly respected on campus. Over the past ten years since the last report was prepared by Leland Park, the library has made significant changes. Technology has been enhanced, the building has been improved and library staff turnover has been well managed to maintain, and improve the quality of services.

Transylvania can take great pride in the library as an important element of the academic program. Building on the accomplishments of the last ten years it should be able to enhance the quality of services in the next ten years. This report identifies the challenges the library faces and recommends next steps.

I wish you well in these endeavors. I encourage you be in touch with me if you have any further questions.

—Tom Kirk (kirkto@earlham.edu), March 2016
Questions addressed

Does the library provide the services our community needs? What needs should the library be addressing in the next three to five years?

I received wide ranging testimonials from all segments of the community—students, faculty, and administration—that the library was fulfilling their needs. The documentation about the library’s first year program in information literacy headlines the services the library provides to the academic program. But there were also other “little things” which were cited as examples of how the library supports the broader educational mission. These include displays to promote the library’s collections, especially the rich Special Collections and displays to promote campus speakers and programs. Still other examples are the provision, in cooperation with IT, of access to specialized software needed for student study on computers in the library, and the purchase of student art.

Another aspect of the library’s service to the community is the integration of the tutoring service into the library. The college administration has facilitated this collaboration with the investment of significant funds to renovate the library to make it more inviting. However by taking on the responsibility for managing the service the library staff has added to their workload. This addition has confounded the library’s ability to enhance its information literacy program.

There is one program area that needs development over the next three to five years. That is the fuller development of information literacy programming for students in second, third and fourth year courses. The librarians have done some instruction for such courses when faculty request it but there is not a sufficiently developed program to scaffold¹ student learning to advanced levels. I heard testimony from librarians and faculty that they often encounter students who have not developed information skills beyond the first year experience and even, in some cases, students have forgotten what they learned in the first year because of a lack of use of the same skills in subsequent courses.

¹ Scaffold is a short hand reference to a carefully developed plan for student learning which builds more sophisticated skills and use of discipline-specific research tools on general and basic research skills learned in first year courses. The process is more than two-steps because within the discipline there are also basic research skills and research tools as well as advanced tools. Such information literacy programs are integrated into the curriculum and depend on close cooperation among teaching faculty and librarians. (Robert Farrell and William Badke (2015) “Situating information literacy in the disciplines: A practical and systematic approach for academic librarians”, Reference Services Review, 43, 2, 319 - 340.)
Is the financial support of the institution sufficient to meet those needs?

Of course there is never enough funds. Life in colleges and their libraries is about making do with what they have. Transylvania has done an excellent job. Strategic planning and thorough communication of needs by the library director to senior administrators has resulted in a level of confidence in the library’s ability to be both a team player as we as a well prepared advocate for library needs.

Having said that I should say that Transy has a remarkably lean budget for the purchase of material as compared with benchmark institutions. While some may point to the availability of an excellent public library and a major university library as reducing the need, there are limitations to how those external libraries can supplement what Transylvania provides. The key is not to assume that those libraries will meet the needs of Transylvania but rather to ensure that the Transylvania library is adequately funded to meet the major needs of the faculty and students for course research. It is especially important that major digital collections of books and periodical be maintained as well as the discovery tools (e.g., bibliographic databases) that are used to access such material.

Transylvania University’s most significant budget shortfall in supporting the library is staffing. I write in the first section about the need to develop an information literacy program for the academic programs (disciplines). It is my judgement that the lack of a fully developed program is largely due to the lack of adequate staff in the library to support the program.

No doubt some will quickly point to a comparison of staffing levels at Transylvania with your benchmark institutions. And I will grant that Transy is not grossly understaffed. However Transylvania and many other college libraries have failed to fully develop their information literacy programs. At other institutions I have visited the reasons for such a deficiency are complex and often related to other aspects of the library and institution: poor management, poor facilities, totally inadequate budget, librarians not interested in student learning, and uncooperative faculty. Transylvania is blessed not to have any of those problems. In making the most of existing resources the Transylvania library has positioned itself to make full advantage of additional staffing to raise the information literacy program to a new level which will directly improve the quality of the college’s liberal arts program.

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2 I will assume that Transylvania believes that information fluency is an important element of a quality liberal arts program and thus aspires to develop such a program. This is clearly stated in the library’s strategic plan and the exemplary first year program gives evidence to that commitment. However if there is need for a clear and concise rationale for information fluency as part of the liberal arts the following article is a classic: Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shelley K. Hughes, (1996) Information literacy as a liberal art. Educom Review 31, 2, 31-36
**Is the staffing adequate to provide the needed services?**

The staff of the Transylvania library are commitment to the institution and are clearly focused on fostering student learning, especially through involvement with the first year program. Faculty in the program, testified that the librarians involved in the first year program courses are effective teachers.

As I argue above there is a need to expand into second, third and fourth year courses in academic programs. While some activity is happening in selected programs the information literacy activities are now limited by the level of staffing. Ideally the institution should add an instruction/reference librarian and that should be the intermediate term goal. However financial realities may make that impossible in the next year or so. If so, other less expensive mechanisms ought to be implemented within a year to allow the current staff to grow the instruction program with the expectation that an instruction/reference librarian position will be added in the next three to four years.

Also there is a need for additional staffing in Special Collections. Transylvania has uncommon collections of real historical importance. Any increase in use is hindered by lack of staffing, particular if there is to be greater use of collections by Transylvania students. Expansion of the instruction program will almost certainly result in greater student use of Special Collections. There is a need to process collections, including new acquisitions of college records but those tasks are almost impossible to undertake while providing support for the use of the collections.

The use of Special Collections is different than the use of other parts of the library’s facilities and collections. The rest of the library has much in common with other libraries and users have some basic sense of the organization and tools (e.g., library catalog). Furthermore once the user learns about the Transylvania library they can work independently. However Special Collections is different, as it is at every other library. Because of the unique organization of the collections dictated by their unique nature, and the need for greater protection of their physical condition, staff at Special Collections must be continually engaged with researchers. This is even more important with undergraduates who are novice researchers and know little about the protocols of using archives and rare book collections. While the potential for research projects using the Special Collections is huge the lack of staffing constrains that use. I encourage the institution to seek grants and gifts which can support special projects to process collections and digitize the most important ones.

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**Is there adequate consultation between library staff, faculty and administration about the needs of the library and the development of services, resources and collections the library provides?**

There is exemplary communication among segments of the Transylvania community about library needs and planning to address challenges. Every segment of the college community with which I met—students, faculty, and administration—seemed comfortable with their knowledge about the library and felt the management of the library was effective.

While there is a Library Advisory Sub-Committee of the CPC that body has not been active and the membership listed on the college web site is not current. Actually I am not surprised, my experience is that such a committee is relatively inactive when there are not major concerns in the faculty! So the inaction of a committee is actually a sign that communication of the library with the faculty is going on outside the committee. At other institutions such conditions often lead to the laying down of the committee to reduce busyness of faculty. Transylvania’s faculty may want to consider this option in consultation with the library or develop an agenda of concerns that have not yet surfaced.

The one aspect of communication that I think may be lacking is the need for more educational services for faculty about library’s collections and services. Comments from some faculty suggested that there is not a clear sense of what resources the library has. Some faculty overestimate the availability of sources while others are not aware of resources the library does have.

**Are the facilities adequate to support the services and house the collections of the library?**

Yes. Renovations and upgrading in the last three years have made a marked improvement. Repeatedly both faculty and students commented on the improved study environment. Special mention was made of the increased availability of group study spaces as well as the variety of new seating configurations.

With plans already underway for further enhancements including addressing deferred maintenance challenges in the building I expect that facility’s needs (e.g., HVAC, repainting of old sections, incorporating the Writing Center) will be addressed.

Improvement of facilities is important. Transylvania student’s comments confirmed what has been reported on other campuses. While the library becomes less important as a place to store bound containers of information (e.g. books, paper periodicals), it has become more important as an academic/social center. The library facility has become increasingly important as a locale for expertise in doing research, group study spaces, access to technology and additional academic support (e.g., tutoring, writing center). At the same
time the rituals of academic study confirm the continued importance of the library as a quiet place to study.\(^4\)

I heard some minor complaints about library furniture and would encourage the library to use focus groups to fine-tune plans for further upgrading of furniture and decoration of the building. One deficiency seems to be the inadequate availability of electrical outlets for laptop computers.

**Are Transylvania students prepared to function in an information centered society? How might we improve?**

Transylvania did not present evidence that they can answer this question. That is not unusual; few colleges can answer this question convincingly. Thus institutional developments in this aspect of information literacy programming would be ground breaking in higher education, not just improve Transylvania’s program. The Transylvania library staff, to their credit, have made efforts to measure improvement in the students’ knowledge of bibliographic and research concepts and that is useful in fine tuning their instruction. I would encourage the library, collaborating with faculty, to develop a means to demonstrate improvement of students’ performance. The citations in this footnote may provide some useful examples and starting points for discussion.\(^5\)

**What is the role of libraries on campuses in the future?**

The role will be to continue to provide programs that enhance student learning. The quality of existing circumstances, the broad institutional commitment, and the stature of librarians

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among faculty is a harbinger of a significant role in the development of the college’s teaching and student learning. I believe the library is on the right track and has the capacity to make course corrections as circumstances at Transylvania change.

**What would you like to say that has not been covered by the questions above?**

There are three other points I want to make that don’t fit neatly within the questions above.

1. The library has effectively put technology to work in enhancing services and gaining greater efficiencies. These have included for example, LibGuides (manages library website), WorldShare Platform (integrated library system), and ILLiad (interlibrary loan management software). The planning going on to develop digital collections indicates the library will continue to evolve as new technology becomes available. It is important that this effort to implement technology be supported through support of professional development for the library staff. I have seen many college libraries that have become isolated and as a result are deficient in the use of technology. The Transylvania library staff’s engagement with the profession through attendance at national, regional and state meetings should not be allowed to atrophy along with communication technology-based instruction (e.g., conference calls, web seminars).

2. An assessment of the Transylvania Library would not be complete without some attention to the existence of the nearby University of Kentucky Libraries and the Lexington Public Library. The Transylvania library has taken a judicious position in its relationship with them. Transylvania has neither become over dependent nor reluctant to acknowledge their usefulness to Transylvania students and faculty. The library has thought through its priorities and makes readily available essential resources while using nearby libraries as a supplement to the collections on campus. It is important that the library discuss this philosophy with faculty so that all members of the educational team have a common vision and counsel students to effectively exploit the Transylvania library, including consultation with a Transylvania librarian, before using alternative libraries.

3. The collaborative work of the librarians with the faculty of the First Year Program demonstrates the value of librarians in developing Transylvania’s academic program. The interests and skills of the current librarians suggest they are willing and capable of teaming with the faculty in development of the academic program beyond the First Year Program. They can be a valuable institutional resource that contributes to the development of the academic program. Therefore an invitation to serve on curriculum planning committees will benefit the institution while strengthening the library’s integration into the Transylvania University’s academic program.
Conclusion

The Transylvania University’s J. Douglas Gay Jr. / Frances Carrick Thomas Library is a well-run and highly effective organization which has made the most of the resources it has received. At the same time the Library can improve its services, particularly to upper class courses, through an enhanced information literacy program. To do so the library needs additional qualified staff or current staff need to be freed from day-to-day management of library operations to spend more time collaborating with faculty and teaching.

Other aspects of the library –facilities, services, technology and staffing– are operating at effective levels and if maintained will continue to serve the Transylvania academic community well.

The University should be proud of the quality of the library as it represents well the commitment to the liberal arts.
Methodology

Once I was selected as the reviewer for this assessment Susan Brown, library director, shared with me the two page document “External Review of the Library, 2015-2016” and provided copies of or access to many of the documents listed in the External Review document and later in this report. I began about a month before the visit to review those documents and exchanged several emails with Susan with questions which led to further material, also listed later in this report, and clarification of information in the documents.

About two weeks before the visit, I was sent a preliminary schedule for my visit and I asked that the schedule be revised to better fit my plan for interviewing people at Transylvania. My plan used the questions from the External Review document as the focal points of my interviews. I did not slavishly step through the questions but rather used them as a jumping off point for discussions about library conditions—staff, facilities, collections and services—and its adequacy in meeting the needs of the college’s academic program. In keeping with the mission of the library and its strategic plans I focused much of my attention on the information literacy program and the related aspects—communication with faculty, adequacy of collections, and quality of instruction.

Upon completion of the visit and my return home I began to synthesize the notes I had taken and the impressions I developed as a result of the earlier reading of the documents, my physical experience of visiting the library facility and the thoughts shared by those I interviewed. Furthermore I selectively researched the literature in order to offer resources which provide background for my comments.

Through this process I gained, I believe, a full sense of the status of the library in the Transylvania University community. Through broad input from multiple modalities and wide representation of segments for the Transylvania community I developed a set of impressions which I have tried to communicate in this report.
Persons interviewed

Students
Abby Cullen, First Year Student and Library Student Worker
Alice Boos, Senior Biology Major and Library Student Worker
Riley Bresnahan, Sophomore Self-Designed Major (Identity and Othering)
Kate Rice, Senior Mathematics Major and Library Student Worker
Hussain Sidiqi, Junior Biology/French Double Major

Faculty
Carole Barnsley, Associate Professor of Religion
Martha Billips, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and First Year Program Coordinator
Melissa Fortner, Associate Professor of Psychology and Director of First Engagements
   (August Term class)
David Kauffman, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Classics
Scott Whiddon, Associate Professor of Writing, Rhetoric and Communication and
   Director of the Writing Center

Library staff
Susan Brown, Library Director
Helen Bischoff, Head of Public Services
Robert Campbell, Reference & Instruction Librarian
Jason Cooper, Head of Technical Services
Ann Long, Acquisitions Supervisor
Jeremy Puckett, Cataloging and Digitization Specialist
Phil Walker, ILL Manager and Night Supervisor

Senior Administration
Laura Bryan, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the College
Marc Matthew, Vice President of Finance
Documents reviewed

- The Biennial Report of the Library – The library gathers a report biennially to report on its goals and assessments. This is our self-study.

- Library staff organization chart. Additional information on the library staff can be seen in the Annual Report of the Library.

- Comparison of libraries based on 2014 IPEDS/NCES Data – A report gathered by the librarian for the Dean of the College and the Library Subcommittee of CPC

- Information on Library Subcommittee of CPC
  http://libguides.transy.edu/FacultyStaffInfo/LibraryAdvisorySubcommittee

- Library Mission, Goals, Strategies and Assessments document

- ACE Tutoring Report, 2014-15 – in the fall of 2013, the library took on the management and coordination of tutoring on campus. The report here is provided for information.

- Information Literacy Plan 2015

- Information Literacy for the First Year Research Seminar, Winter 2016

- Outcomes for the First Year Library Instruction at Transylvania University, 2016-2017 academic Year (Draft)

- Transylvania Library External Review, April 2005, prepared by Leland Park

- Tiered, Unit-based Outline for IL Instruction (Draft)

- Individual Units for FYRS Instruction

- Variety of library instructional materials for upper class courses

- Additional reports are available at
  http://libguides.transy.edu/GeneralInfo/StatsAndDocumentation