External Review

by

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My charge was to conduct an "external review" of the J. Douglas Gay, Jr./Frances Carrick Thomas Library at Transylvania University. I was on the Transylvania University campus from the afternoon of Wednesday, March 2nd through the afternoon of Friday, March 4th.

I interviewed over thirty members of the administration, library staff, faculty, and students (names listed in Appendix I). The interview schedule is listed (Appendix III). In addition, I have studied college publications and many reports, documents, and statistics which were supplied by the library director (partial list in Appendix II). All of this was done in order to obtain a clear understanding of where Transylvania University and its Library have been, are, and plan to be in the future. This report is hereby submitted based on this background information.
REPORT

It is important to say right at the first that the review found that there is a large reservoir of good will towards the library on the Transylvania University campus. Faculty and students report that they need it, they use it, and they appreciate it...and have glowing reports on the professional abilities and spirit of helpfulness exhibited by the library staff. There are, of course, a variety of comments about ways for improvement, which shows the patrons care. But without the feeling of need and appreciation and goodwill, chances for improvement would be difficult at best. This spirit is a credit to all concerned, in and out of the library. This existing spirit, also, means that the library is a "good investment" in Transylvania University's present and future mission as a distinguished educational institution.

I. PHYSICAL FACILITIES

The location of the library building is a prime one on campus, convenient and central, as it should be. The addition that was made a number of years ago was done with care, with design sensitivity, and with commendable function/service integration between the old and new facilities. The arrangement which presents the reference desk to the patron immediately on entering the building is appropriate and indicates immediately that 'we're here to help.' The directory is well placed and easy to consult. The use of glass for the conference and group study rooms and the entrance to the administrative areas is a welcome sign of openness, which befits the spirit of the staff. The maintenance of the building is commendable. I walked all over the building during the day and during evening hours and found the areas well looked after (bathrooms, too). That is a credit to the housekeeping staff. As with any public facility which is heavily used, furnishings can get worn, used, alas, tired looking. There are some areas which show that some 'sprucing up' is called for...repainting, reupholstering, replacing. This is not, of course, uncommon in a public building, but it should be attended to. Deferred maintenance in such a facility can cause rapid deterioration.

Mentioned in several of the reports, and a common notice in academic libraries, is the desire by students to collaborate, to work together. It is, also, a subtle pedagogical change in the last number of years. The addition of a group study room on the main floor was a wise one. Additional ones would be appropriate...and, I am sure, used.

Libraries by their very nature of service require additional space as collections, services, and uses grow. The collection, while growing slowly, will soon outgrow the space available. The construction of the bookstore adjoining the Library was a wonderful decision. And the availability of the ground floor of that building for Library stack space
is important, ....as soon as possible. The exact use of the space should be determined by the professional librarians, working with the library advisory committee and others. It could be that compact shelving could be located there, housing bound periodicals. That might free other space to add group study rooms elsewhere in the building, or allow any relocation of other space, as in the domino effect. Regardless, the administration and the trustees are to be commended for having the foresight to make that basement level of the bookstore available for the Library. I strongly recommend that it be made available now, thus then allowing other adjustments in the Library’s space arrangements.

In days past, customers of users of facilities and services like an academic library (or any other campus activity or service or facility) were a given. It was there, it was used. Today, these services and facilities are there, but ‘sales/PR’ are really required. The Library does a grand job with its brochures and handouts and annual reports, etc. I would consider, given the day we are living in and given the nature of students and faculty now, to allow some coffee house arrangement, maybe in connection with the new bookstore.....and/or having benches and even tables in front of the Library on the beautiful terrace area. Of course, it would be a good area for the students to use the cell phones which are glued to their ears (rather than in the building disturbing others), but it also would put make the Library appear even more evidently as an enjoyable place-to-be.

II. SERVICES

The usual complement of service are offered in the Library, and I am impressed with the sophistication of these services and overall quality of them. The staff has been proactive and responsive in identifying opportunities for service and for having the Library a significant part of the academic enterprise at TU.

The First-Year Liberal Arts-Experience (FLA) is a splendid opportunity for the educational experience of students to incorporate immediate as well as life-long-learning skills in the pursuit of academic research in the Library. The success of this program and the Library’s involvement with this is impressive. The continuation of this involvement is an absolute must, its expansion to include all FLA classes should be of the highest priority. This, indeed, helps not only the academic success of TU’s students, it can meet the challenge of information fluency (or information literacy) on the campus—a worth and reasonable goal.

The University 1111: Academic Career Skills is required of all new students. It appears to me, though, that this is an opportunity missed. Students are often the ones who are responsible for arranging the activities, they are not held accountable for seeing that all of the areas are covered, and the time allocated (if indeed they even come to the Library) varies. This means that there is no base line of information about the Library, its services and staff conveyed to every new student. Some are conscientious about the program, it is my impression that is not the rule. At some point, at some level in the college’s administration, the University 1111 program should be re-evaluated and, if
students are to administer or plan part of it, they then should be held accountable. And the goals for each area, certainly that of the Library, should be clearly stated.

The high quality of reference services was commented on by faculty and students. Librarians have a fine reputation for being friendly and knowledgeable and anxious to be of help. Regular reference assistance, FLA instruction sessions, University 1111 sessions (if they are held) and RAPs (research assistance program) are all examples of a professional staff ready and qualified to help. Interlibrary loan services are conveniently and speedily processed. And circulation and reserve services are appropriate and well handled. The availability of laptop computers for checkout is a fine service for the students.

The hours appear to meet the needs of TU students; however, there are several ameliorating factors. One is that there are several student rooms or other locations on campus which are open either late night or all night for study. And the availability of the library at the University of Kentucky, with longer hours, is a valuable asset. (More on this later in the report.) If these two factors were not present, then I believe there would be a need for later hours on Friday and more hours on Saturday with reference services available. I found no apparent call for additional hours now. Note: The extension of hours during the exam period is a fine service which is appreciated by students.

III. STAFF

This Library Staff is an enormous credit to Transylvania University. The librarians are energetic, professional, and dedicated to TU and its Library's mission. The fact that the support staff all have college degrees is a big 'plus' to the Library; the added fact that some are working on a graduate degree in library science is a compliment to them. And the longevity of members of the staff is another credit to TU and to the sense of purpose which has been continued over the years and to this day in the Library. They consider it a privilege to work at TU....and I am sure TU considers it fortunate to have them. I can say that I did not note any 'camps' or 'subtle fusses' in evidence. I know that there are some professional differences of opinion about some procedures or policies, but the mutual respect I noted is a credit to the library director and all of the staff.

Considering the standard responsibilities which are expected of the librarians in each of their areas of administration, public services, tech services, and special collections, and considering the teaching in the FLA program, RAP services, University 1111, and reference services, to say they are stretched thin is an understatement. These services could not be done if there was not such motivation by the librarians....and if they did not have the outstanding support staff working with them. There is, frankly, no 'bench strength' at all. If these present services are to be extended—as was mentioned earlier—at least one additional professional librarian will be needed soon. If there was an extended illness or other sudden happening by/to a staff member, the entire library service could be placed in jeopardy. Also, having professional reference services
available on weekends would be a good addition. There might be some arrangement with the graduate library school at the University of Kentucky which could be beneficial.

When there is small staff, attendance at professional meetings, workshops, conferences, etc. is crucial. While there are other librarians on the staff, there will be only one who specializes in technical processes, in public services, in special collections, in administration, etc. The need to have a network of other professional librarians with whom one can exchange ideas, to keep current with the developments in the field, is an absolute necessity if Transylvania University's library staff is to be up-to-date. As such, the travel-conference-continuing education budget for the Library should be always maintained and, at times, avenues for special funding should be made available for unique opportunities that arise for the staff. And professional activity by the librarians serves TU well, for it helps raise the visibility of the university in academic circles and in turn, can contribute to the recruitment of staff at all levels.

IV. COLLECTION

This is an area which I candidly say worries me.

The development of a library's collection is vital to the success of the academic enterprise. It is my opinion that any accrediting body or academic fraternity will question the overall commitment to a quality educational program of the institution if library support fluctuates greatly and does not approach at least the average of its peers. The statistics I have seen show that among the independent institutions in Kentucky, TU was 7th in Library support based on expenditure per FTE student and 7th in total library expenditures. With the NCES data for benchmark institutions, TU was last for both total library expenditures and for expenditures per FTE students.

Given the short time I was on campus, I cannot talk about the overall or specific quality of the collection itself. My impression, however, from talking to faculty and to the librarians is that what is in the collection is quality, due to faculty and librarian participation in the selection.

Nevertheless, the smaller size of the collection and the smaller annual support of the Library's budget appears to be based on the physical proximity of the large University of Kentucky Library. This major resource, a member of the Association of Research Libraries, has many different branch libraries and millions of volumes. And since this is a state supported institution, access to its collection is available to all TU faculty and students. There is an agreement which was signed by the library director at UK and TU in March of 2001 which gave permission to each library's constituents to borrow materials from the other. And TU runs a shuttle to the UK library daily. The number of TU students riding the shuttle each month in 2003-04 ranged from 47 in September, 71 in October, 91 in February, 44 in April, etc. There are no figures on the number of TU students who drive to the UK library in their own car. And there are no figures to
indicate which libraries they use, how many books they check out, what reference assistance they obtain. I recommend that student use of the UK libraries be examined more closely.

I believe that having this UK resource available is an enormous educational advantage – and even a faculty and student recruitment advantage for TU. It is lucky. At the same time, there are, I feel, some lost educational opportunities happening at TU. If a student goes directly to UK’s library, the TU library staff has no idea what areas the students are researching in case that it is an area which should be built up in the TU Library. At the same time, if the student goes directly to the UK library, it is entirely possible that there are adequate resources in the TU library for his/her project……but he/she did not check first.

What is missing is some kind of professional working arrangement between the UK and TU libraries, not just the mutual lending agreement. I do not know the exact form that should or would take, but I believe that representatives of both libraries would benefit from discussing the situation as it is now and trying to determine if there was a better way to coordinate their relationship. While legally a TU student can go to the UK library ‘without introduction,’ it seems to me a good arrangement could be to require the TU student to check with one of the librarians at the TU library before being permitted by the UK library to check out materials on a particular topic. If the TU student had to check with a TU librarian first it would (1) require that the student check to see if there are appropriate materials already in the TU library and thus not need to go to UK; (2) would allow the TU library to see what research areas the students are handling and determine if those are appropriate areas for the TU library collection to include; (3) foster a research relationship with the TU students and TU librarians; (4) reassure the UK library that it is not serving as a ‘first line of defense’ for TU students but is offering the extended and more in depth research resources not ordinarily appropriate for an undergraduate library such as TU.

The real selling point for TU, it seems to me, is to have a first rate Library which is on campus with a collection which supports the usual undergraduate research needs. And, when the student does more esoteric or in-depth research than an undergraduate library would be able to support, then the UK library is available.

This, or some appropriate relationship, should be worked out with UK and TU libraries. Otherwise, it appears that TU is avoiding its responsibility to fund a library appropriate to an institution of its fine caliber.
V. AUTOMATION.

The TU library has employed an impressive and appropriate array of automation/computer resources and services. The fact that the Library computer system is located in the Library and is the responsibility entirely of two members of the Library Staff is amazing ... and a bit of a worry. Hopefully there is adequate backup for them with appropriate cross training of other staff members (if they have the time to do that). This is an area which, if it goes ‘down’, affects everyone one on campus and the entire academic enterprise. The work they do is impressive.

The array of the online resources which the TU library offers on its own or through the Kentucky Virtual Library is substantial.

At some point, some consideration might be given to digitizing some of the materials placed on reserve. This would be a popular move since the campus is wired.

An appropriately arranged electronic classroom for instruction with FLA classes and other groups should be on the needs-list.

VI. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The special collections of TU’s Library are unique among liberal arts college libraries in the south and compete, I suspect, only with some of the older New England colleges’ libraries. It is an amazing collection, housed in an impressive area, worthy of the collection. This is a resource which can be/should be continually ‘mined’ in making it available to researchers on and off campus. As such, when funds are available, being sure that the entire collection has been catalogued and thus available through a national network is a worthy goal and project. Obviously, that takes additional full time or part-time or temporary staffing to realize.

VII. MISCELLANEOUS

- Before the faculty votes to adopt a new course for any department, it would be useful for the appropriate committee to ask the Library if there are adequate resources to support the course (vs. assuming automatically that UK would support it.) This gives the Library an automatic way to keep on top of changing course needs.
- Inventory of the collection. A regular, continuing program of inventoring the collection should be considered. This keeps the stacks in order, the catalogue current, and indicates those items which are needed and should be replaced. It also can identify regularly those items in the collection in need of preservation/rebinding work.
- It is important that faculty members be engaged in the use and development of the Library. As such, it would be appropriate if the Dean of the College, at such time
as a faculty member is coming up for contract renewal or for tenure, asked the Library Director for a report on that faculty member's use of and activity with the Library.

This report was a pleasure to prepare, because Transylvania University is building on strength. You are blessed with a quality educational institution which requires a quality library. The Library is a central resource and undergirds the entire enterprise -- it deserves good support. That support will be vital to the continual improvement of academic offering and standards on the campus.

Investment in the Transylvania University Library has....and will....pay big dividends.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX I

Interviews

March 2-4, 2005

Charles L. Shearer, President
William Pollard, Vice President of Academic Affairs/Dean of the College
Jerry Ray, Vice President of Finance
Michael Vetter, Dean of Students
Martha Billips, Director of First-Year Liberal Arts Experience (FLA)
Sarah Emmons, Director of Public Relations
Deana Ison, Associate Director of Admissions

Faculty from divisions:
Greg Partain, Fine Arts
Simoneetta Cochis, Humanities
Chris Begley, Social Sciences
Sharon Brown, Ed/PE
Judi Jones, Business/Economics
David Choate, Sciences
Katherine Janiec Jones, Religion
Darrell Banks, Director of Physical Plant
Elizabeth Fugazzi, Coordinator of Institutional Research and Assessment

Faculty Library Subcommittee:
David Choate, Sciences
Alan Bartley, Business/Economics
Dan Selter, Fine Arts

Library Staff:
Susan Brown, Library Director
BJ Gooch, Special Collections Librarian
Carolyn M. Tassie, Public Services Librarian
Linda Orr, Technical Services Librarian
Ann Long, Acquisitions
Stephen Leist, Circulation
Phil Walker, Night Manager
Matt Cross, Cataloguing

Students:
Amanada Kerleyh
Alix Yocum
Karen Watkins
Clint Morris
Jeremiah Shilling
Ken Fisher
Amanda Phelps
Deborah Gallo
APPENDIX II

Printed Items Consulted

Transylvania University Catalogue, 2004-2005
University Library Annual Reports, 2002-2003; 2003-2004
Library Budget Request, 2005-2006
History of the Library Budget (10 year comparison)
2003 Long-Range Plan for Transylvania University (library sections)
Planning and Assessment Document for Transylvania University, 21003-2004 (library sections)
Quality Enhancement Plan, January 2, 2002
QEP Recommendation 6: re Library
Online surveys of faculty and students, re: library
Statistical Comparison of Libraries based on 2002 NCES Data
Miscl. Library Publications/Brochures

Reciprocal Lending Policy for the University of Kentucky Libraries
and Transylvania University Libraries (dtd 3/12/01)
Staff Organizational Chart