Towards 2015: Reenvisioning Cornell University Library with Reduced Resources

Even in the current fiscal environment, Cornell University has the opportunity to dramatically strengthen its ability to provide access to information resources for research, teaching, learning, and creative expression by reimagining the systems and models of the Library. The rapid evolution in the methods of information access and provision, the nature of scholarly communication, the relentless increases in the costs of publications, and the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, coupled with the current economic pressures, call for a fundamental change.

We propose five key recommendations for the Library:

1) Organize the Library system around cross-college library subject clusters;

2) Protect the Library collections budget from additional cuts;

3) Make the Library part of a new multi-institutional entity for providing information services;

4) Provide faculty, researchers, and students with the best affordable academic technology services to meet the varying needs of their disciplines by integrating the efforts of the Library, CIT, and the individual units;

5) Deploy a new resource allocation model that consolidates the Library budget under the management of the University Librarian in consultation with academic deans and university administrators.

These recommendations have been informed by the work of the Library Strategic Planning Task Force and reflect the consensus of the Library's senior leadership. Only by realigning our resources and consolidating our service points will the library continue to guarantee access to scholarly resources across the wide range of disciplines supported at Cornell. Library facilities will continue to be places where students can study, learn, collaborate and find knowledgeable professionals to help. Through both physical and virtual spaces, researchers will find the information they need to support their inquiries; count on deep expertise to develop the rich collections on which they depend; and partner with library professionals to explore and exploit the existing and emerging scholarly communication channels in order to share their knowledge.

New Library Model

Long into the foreseeable future, the Library will be constantly re-inventing itself to incorporate new research areas, pedagogies, and technologies and balancing competing resource demands. Fostering that evolution by strategically reengineering the systems and models we use, will allow us to succeed in the 21st century information environment with reduced resources. Cornell University Library, like most of its peers in the research library community, is reconceiving library services and collections to leverage information technology and digital access to cope with falling purchasing power, align with strategic directions for higher education, and meet new needs and expectations of faculty and students. This new model is based on a phased approach from now until 2015 that could realize a total savings in the Library's current operating budget upwards to 15%, and a return to the university of significant on-campus space for repurposing. On the Ithaca/Geneva campus, this vision is predicated on reconfiguring the Library around cross-college subject clusters. Without reducing the supervisory and support costs

associated with managing a highly distributed system and maintaining eighteen facilities, we do not see how to meet this full budget cut while protecting excellence. This vision also relies on reengineering the Library in the context of multi-institutional partnerships, beginning with the collaboration between Cornell and Columbia libraries and expanding outward to encompass others. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has just funded a two-year planning phase for these two great library systems to implement a significant integration of services and collections.

We hold that the following will remain critical responsibilities for Cornell University Library (CUL) into the foreseeable future.

- Guarantee access to scholarly resources across the wide range of disciplines supported at Cornell. It will be essential to protect the collections budget from further erosion, align collection building with university priorities, as well as promote alternative forms of scholarly expression, including open access, to combat the exorbitant pricing by commercial publishers.

- Balance library collections and services to support research, teaching, and learning across the humanities, social sciences, sciences/engineering, and professional schools.

- Build distinct special collections that complement the university's strategic directions and enhance Cornell's ability to recruit and retain world-class faculty and students.

- Partner with faculty in integrating new technologies into existing scholarly workflows, including data curation, reuse, and preservation.

- Contribute to the advancement of undergraduate teaching and learning by collaborating in new programs and services such as integrating information competency into course design and assignments.

- Reduce duplication and overlapping IT services on campus while broadening support for academic technology services to faculty, students, and the greater Cornell community.

- Provide facilities, tools, resources, expertise, and services needed by faculty and students to innovate and succeed academically across disciplinary lines and in emerging domains.

This bold proposal will succeed only if it is supported by the University Administration, including the Deans, as well as the faculty and students. Strategies for meeting this vision include:

1. LIBRARY FACILITIES. Just as schools and colleges are merging/eliminating academic departments, the Library will need to reduce the number of physical libraries to achieve significant savings in its operating budget. The remaining library facilities should be reconfigured and upgraded as needed to serve as academic hubs supporting research, writing, and scholarly expression that are appropriate to disciplinary needs.

2. STUDY SPACE. As the number of library facilities is reduced, it will be important to ensure that the quality and quantity of student study spaces are not diminished. The Library will reconfigure additional spaces within library facilities to increase the number of study spaces and will work with college and university administrators to help design additional secure spaces within non-library buildings.

3. GOING DIGITAL. Reducing the number of library facilities will require upfront investment to ensure digital access to materials through aggressive digitization and expansive license arrangements to incorporate the retrospective literature as well as the means to make materials easily accessible remotely.

4. COLLECTIVE COLLECTIONS. Just as we have moved to eliminate duplicative holdings on campus, research libraries collaboratively can achieve both savings and expanded coverage by minimizing the redundancy of holdings. This is applicable to collections that are comprehensive in scope and support research at the advanced level, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

5. EXPEDITED DOCUMENT DELIVERY. Content not owned/physically managed by Cornell must be made readily accessible to faculty and students at convenient locations. The current interlibrary loan programs, including Borrow Direct, need to be enhanced.

Conclusion

A top ten research library in North America, the Library is a highly valued partner in teaching, research and learning at Cornell University. The Library offers cutting-edge programs, internationally recognized expertise, and outstanding collections from rare books and manuscripts to a significant network of digital resources. It is possible to maintain the Library's top ranked position and continue to meet emerging needs in the academy with reduced resources. It is possible to retain all the physical library units on campus. But it is impossible to do both. The current economic climate provides the stimulus to rethink basics. It also offers the opportunity to appreciate that maintaining a significant number of physical facilities in an increasingly digital world bleeds our ability to provide critical scholarly resources and essential services. Andrew Dickson White recognized that "the ideas of a great university and a great library are inextricably linked." By making tough choices now, Cornell University Library will honor that connection in the 21st century.