Periodic Outside Review of the Murray Library at Messiah College Provided by Janet Hurlbert, Associate Dean and Director of Library Services, Snowden Library, Lycoming College
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I. Background

In preparation for my observation visit on April 16, 2013, I reviewed multiple documents provided by Jonathan Lauer, Director of the Library and Learning Commons. The documents included organization charts, a 2006 Program Review prepared by the Murray Library Leadership Team, an outside 2006 Program Review by Dr. Harold Shill, benchmark/competitive data, and LibQual assessments. I also examined the Murray Library website. My visit consisted of meetings with all staff members; the library director; Dr. William Strausbaugh, Associate Provost/Chief Information Officer; Dr. Robin Lauermann, Assistant Dean for General Education and Common Learning; and members of the Faculty Library Committee.

The outside review came at a time when the Murray Library is nearing completion of a phase one renovation. There is some uncertainty about what the future holds, but also enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the staff to create a positive and innovative academic space for the Messiah College community.

This report is arranged according to principles outlined in the most recent (2011) *ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education.* These are the focus areas for academic libraries as outlined by our national professional organization. I have also integrated information from the ACRL "2012 Top Ten Trends in Academic Libraries," (*College and Research Libraries News*, June, 2012).

II. Planning and Management for Institutional Effectiveness

Management/Administration: *Libraries engage in continuous planning and assessment to inform resource allocation and to meet their mission effectively and efficiently.*
Institutional Effectiveness: *Libraries define, develop, and measure outcomes that contribute to institutional effectiveness and apply findings for purposes of continuous improvement.*

There is no greater testament to planning and integration with institutional effectiveness than the information commons venture. I attended a meeting of the Learning Commons Taskforce at the start of my site visit.

In the past Murray Library has taken part in two LibQual assessments. Though LibQual is expensive and time consuming to administer, it has become a standard among academic libraries, especially as part of preparation for Middle States accreditation, and

1

it is a further way for a library to compare itself with similar institutions. It is obvious from speaking with the librarians that they have studied the results and incorporated the findings into their initiatives.

The library also examines itself in relationship to other libraries using NCES quantitative data. The outside review process and the program review design position Murray Library firmly in the mainstream of how an academic library should assess itself. There is a long standing plan in place for individual student assessment in the first- year information literacy program.

I would make two suggestions. As a complement to the individual assessment of the first year program, I would recommend consideration of the HEDS (Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium) Research Practice Survey which surveys information competencies as freshmen enter an institution. I believe this would fit well with your strong first- year program and be helpful not only to librarians, but also to the classroom instructors. The survey can be used when students approach graduation as a post assessment. By manipulating the data, the end result can factor in major, gender, etc. On most campuses, this survey would have to first be approved by the committee that monitors experimentation on human subjects and might well be conducted in cooperation with the institutional research office and the General Education Program.

My second suggestion would be to consider an in house assessment plan - - short surveys tied to a raffle incentive, focus groups, student interviews - - to monitor the Learning Commons initiative and make appropriate changes. This commitment would also be helpful as future library renovation phases become reality. For example, focus groups with the students who staff your writing center might be most informative about the way the library staff could support and interact with their function as well as furthering good will with this new association. *Studying Students: The Undergraduate Research Project at the University of Rochester* (Foster and Gibbons, eds.) offers suggestions for studies about how students use library services and spaces. Another good resource is "A Multifaceted Approach to the Assessment and Evaluation of Learning Commons Services and Resources," (*College & Undergraduate Libraries*, July, 2010). This article demonstrates the need to remain flexible and sensitive to the changing demands of undergraduate users through policies and procedures. A climate of continuous assessment is fundamental to this commitment.

III. Personnel:

Libraries provide sufficient number and quality of personnel to ensure excellence and to function successfully in an environment of continuous change.

One descriptive word I can use after meeting with both the librarians and support staff is dedicated. Their sincere desire to serve the institution well is obvious. The staff is organized according to traditional lines for academic libraries. The librarians have an

appropriate position within the college structure that enables them to interact with college committees and this is key to library communication. Librarians discussed their involvement on these committees, and faculty praised library contributions and input. One of the ACRL trends for academic libraries notes that the world of higher education is in a state of flux, if not turmoil, and this has a defining impact on the libraries serving these institutions. It is important that librarians be positioned appropriately to insure sound strategic planning. Librarians look forward to the director of Murray Library taking a leadership role in the continuing development of the learning commons model.

 The librarians not only stated that they work well as a team, but it was clear to me through our conversation that this was true. The library support staff stated that they were supported by their immediate supervisors and felt that their contributions were valued by the organization. The Faculty Committee says that the director is well liked among the faculty and brings the committee forward -looking ideas. I felt the Faculty Committee took pride in "their" library and believed that to be representative of the feelings of the campus.

During this transitional time the staff expressed tension about their new locations, and felt that the causal communication lines that they had grown to depend upon would not happen as automatically.   Although some of this may be adjustment, there may also be a need to establish more formal communication paths, perhaps with specific teams created to accomplish short term goals.

The librarians and support staff expressed some frustration with technology support, though they said that responsiveness has improved greatly. I empathize with the library staff that must keep the facility open long hours during the academic year, and feel frustrated that even though a library's focus is information, this information must be delivered through a growing number of different devices that function in multiple ways, to say nothing of the exploding mobile environment. Just as the library of old was often superficially evaluated (unfortunately) according to how well a photocopy machine was working, students evaluate their information requests, in part, with how easily they can receive their information through the appropriate technology. The understanding of the staff was that part of the learning commons concept included an IT support desk and that has not materialized. It seems a very logical definition of a learning commons, and it is my hope that this service component will materialize.

In the future, a goal would be to increase the technology available, and this will also increase the need for more specialized technical assistance. The staff also expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for learning more about library appropriate technologies and changing technologies. I would suggest that mini tutorials conducted by the IT staff with the library staff would not only increase confidence, but also bring the two units together in a collaborative venture. One further concern has to do with library specific technologies. With specialized library systems there is a tendency for IT staff to superficially determine that the "problem" belongs to the specialized service outside the purview of IT.   Communication between the library and IT needs to improve in this area with a focus on resolving the problem as the end goal. I will add that this small tension

3

is quite common between libraries and IT departments. The answer is often a conference call among IT, library, and vendor technician when a problem presents itself and cannot be easily resolved.

Although comparative statistics could easily be used by an outside evaluator to recommend additional staffing, that is naive in our present economy unless staff is being added to other college departments, and the library staff does not believe that that is happening. Service organizations in and out of academia are coping with staffing below the desired level. To quote from ACRL trends, "Academic libraries must develop the staff needed to meet new challenges through creative approaches to hiring new personnel and deploying/retraining existing staff. Staff development and personnel are the top work place issues for academic librarians according to a 2011 ACRL survey." I hope and recommend that college decision makers be sensitive to job flexibility and redefinition in the future. There are many ways to organize a library. Our modern library structure demands that job descriptions change; this does not mean that positions should be eliminated, even if staffing cannot increase.

IV. Collection Resources and Access Technologies

Collections: *Libraries provide access to collections sufficient in quality, depth, diversity, format, and currency to support the research and teaching missions of the institution.*
Discovery: *Libraries enable users to discover information in all formats through effective use of technology and organization of knowledge.*

The Murray Library collection is built by a partnership between faculty departments and librarians and is reflective of the various formats available in the academic library of today. E-books are added to the general collection by individual title and e-collections. All titles are searchable in the book catalog. Bound journal volumes are few in number being replaced by e-journals and journal e-collections. The reference collection is moving to digital formats with only a small print collection remaining. This not only meets the current undergraduates' preference, at least for the journals and reference materials, but also supports any distance learning that the college offers. The budget for materials is allocated through a formula appropriately divided by peers on the library's faculty committee with a separate amount that can be applied to specific deficient areas upon application by an academic department. The database list is impressive and well-presented via the subject Web pages that clearly also include a link to Refworks, basics about actually finding materials, and contact information for the librarian that works with the department. The one addition I would suggest is a plan to finance a discovery system, perhaps investigating the one offered by EBSCO since so many of your databases come from that vendor. One of the ACRL technology trends emphasizes the use of such tools and the Millennial's demand for convenience that changes the approach to information for all users. Although a discovery tool does change approaches to instruction and is not always the ideal way we would have students think about developing a research strategy, it is the way students search today and does

4

elevate their Google mentality while employing similar searching techniques, but with better results.

Murray Library added Illiad as the technology that supports ILL - - a recommendation from the outside evaluator in 2006, although it is my understanding that the librarians actually included it in plans before that date. Some libraries, like Murray Library, are not part of EZ Borrow through PALCI (Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, Inc.), feeling that it is a large budget item that can be handled well utilizing Illiad only. This is understandable, but I would recommend consideration of RapidILL that works with Illiad easily and very efficiently, and at low cost. I would guess that the buy- in each year would pay for itself.

The library has an obvious space problem for the book collection and that will remain even with increased acquisition of digital works. The circulation rate of books per student is enviable and denotes a curriculum that is still scholarly monograph- driven in many ways with good library support. I believe it is obvious in today's concept of a library that more space, if added, may not be for book stacks. The library continues to deselect books, and I would recommend consideration of accessible storage in another facility or an investment in compact shelving. Although an active de-acquisition process is desirable, it would be unfortunate to have to eliminate book titles simply because of space.

The acquisition and processing of materials is undergoing many changes in the library world especially for the smaller college library. I would recommend the following for consideration in the near future, and definitely include their study in strategic planning. Shelf- ready purchase of books through a vendor such as YBP works very well for the undergraduate collection. Purchase on demand with e-book titles is now being used by an increasing number of smaller academic libraries and is included as one of the ACRL future trends. A slip approval plan (implemented digitally) based on a selection profile created by faculty and librarians was recommended by the Shill 2006 outside review; I would echo it. This plan can be combined with the option for patron- driven acquisitions by adding e-book titles in the online catalog. These titles can either be purchased or "borrowed" by users when needed. I believe a plan such as this would be especially supportive on a campus with such a great book use rate. It is quite possible that a well-designed approval plan would remove the need for formula-based acquisitions as departments working with librarians that are obviously respected find that their needs are met by the system. It is a psychological leap, but it does work. Having held positions in two libraries that did not use formulas; I can attest to the fact that such a system leads to a well-rounded collection that still honors faculty contributions.

I understand that a few current journal titles will be displayed in the café area of the information commons. I would also suggest that an attractive book display area for selected new titles and/or displays of Messiah authors or coming lectures might also be included in this area.

5

V. Information Literacy

Educational Role*: Libraries partner in the educational mission of the institution to develop and support information-literate learners who can discover, access, and use information effectively for academic success, research, and lifelong learning.*

The top ten trends for academic libraries do not mention library instruction because it has become such an integral part of what a library does. This is one of the core support areas of the modern academic library especially on a campus like Messiah College. Murray Library has long had a solid instruction program especially on the freshman level. This program is enthusiastically supported through Dr. Robin Lauermann and the General Education Program. Instruction is continually evaluated and assessed, with appropriate changes made.

Recent statistics show that librarians taught 89 instruction sessions at the 100 level, the majority of these being part of the First - Year Seminar offerings. A combined total of 39 workshops were offered on the 200,300, and 400 levels. As the previous evaluator recommended, more emphasis on instruction in the higher levels would be a goal. I would recommend a strategic plan designed around the college's majors to identify those courses with research elements that lead to capstone courses. Obviously, staffing limitations dictate, but I would encourage creative thinking about how to partner with more courses through the instruction program. Annual surveys conducted by EDUCAUSE indicate that the majority of undergraduate students value and prefer face-to-face instruction.   At a school like Messiah, this is obviously the preferred teaching environment. However, I would recommend considering the use of online tutorials (developed locally and/or "borrowed" with due credit from other institutions) and other methods of online instruction through your course management system to enhance and review instruction, communicating some of the more basic information so that the interactive classroom environment can emphasize sophisticated information processes. There is every indication that the librarians have good relations with faculty that they can build upon to further enhance the program. In my experience these partnerships between teaching faculty and librarians have to be developed through personal connection and trust, and it is obvious that these qualities are in place. I noticed that the word "support" was used often when describing the instruction program. Of course that is accurate, but I prefer the word "partnership" when describing the interaction that takes place in designing literacy components for research courses.

One of my strongest recommendations is to work as quickly as possible to establish a library instruction classroom within the library that is large enough to accommodate most of the instruction classes. This classroom should be equipped with advanced technology to model best 21st century teaching. Although the classroom will not be used exclusively for library instruction, it would be under the scheduling control of the librarians with their needs as first priority.   Murray Library has a strong commitment to its instruction program, and it is clear in my conversation with Dr. Lauermann that

6

information literacy holds a valued place in general education. It is common in libraries with dedicated and successful programs to have one fully-equipped classroom that focuses on instruction. It also shows institutional support and respect for this vital library focus. An adequate teaching facility for librarians was recommended in the 2006 Shill outside evaluation. I quote from that report, "Fourth, and perhaps most crucial, this facility should be scheduled by the Library, given the growing importance of information literacy instruction in the current, increasingly complex information environment." I am uncertain as to whether the Phase Two multi-media "innovation zone" would truly meet this important need.

VI. Professional Values*:*

Libraries advance professional values of intellectual freedom, intellectual property rights and values, user privacy and confidentiality, collaboration, and user-centered service.

I know from personal experience that the Murray Library librarians are greatly respected within the ACLCP (Associate College Libraries of Central Pennsylvania) cooperative. Jonathan Lauer has served as an officer within the organization, most recently President. Continuing education funds within the Murray Library budget enable librarians to attend national meetings and workshops so important to keeping current with academic trends. In my conversations with faculty and with Dr, Strausbaugh, Vice President for Technology, it is obvious that the librarians are respected and considered "experts" in their field. As I've already stated, when I spoke with staff their dedication to providing services to the college community as well as the ease in which they seem to work with each other create a very professional organization

There is growing recognition of copyright procedures within academic communities as the digital age presents even more challenges. I would anticipate that there will also be more legal decisions as well. Libraries play different roles on different campuses regarding this issue. It appears as if Messiah as a college handles copyright procedures with the librarians handling individual reference questions about copyright.

Librarians at Murray Library consider how reference services can and should be offered. Multiple options are available to Messiah students - - chat, email, text. The reference desk dilemma is compounded by the design of the new reference desk service point that I will consider in a later section of this report. Nationally, reference inquiries continue to decline, and there is a constant questioning of where a librarian's time is best spent. At Murray Library assessment indicates that students are very satisfied with the information they receive as well as the personal interaction – - so it is frustrating - - how does the staff get more students to experience this service? Or is this impossible, and another direction should be pursued? There is no universal answer; and it remains to be seen if the idea of a learning commons might increase student interest in taking advantage of this point-of -use service. Each academic library must evaluate and decide what is appropriate for its particular institution. The important point is that the question must be considered and evaluated frequently, with a willingness to be flexible

7

and consider new ways of offering services. I am of the personal opinion that the age of the reference desk is over, but I stress my previous statement. Every institution has a unique character and must consider the options that are specific to its college setting.

VII, External Relations

Libraries engage the campus and broader community through multiple strategies in order to advocate, educate, and promote their value.

The first ACRL trend listed is the need for libraries to communicate their value to their communities. This seems like a contradiction in terms - - college libraries should be automatically valued on campuses. Those days are over; and it is the library staff that must take the initiative to develop methods to communicate worth.   The learning commons offers the library a way to further define itself in a new way to the campus. Murray Library communicates in the traditional manner with departmental liaisons and information in the campus newsletter. I would suggest following a model used by some academic libraries and create a simple marketing plan for each semester that communicates in various ways about library/information commons services. A new environment offers new opportunities, and the library should be viewed as a place of action and intellectual excitement. I quote Robin Wagner, the well-respected director of the library at Gettysburg College, who always says she wants the campus to see the library as a "happening place."

 Community relations include lifelong learning associations with the Messiah Village and hosting high school students for assignment assistance as well as opening facilities to home schoolers and reaching out to grade school students because of the Engle Memorial Collection of Children's Book Illustration.   The library cooperates with the Midtown Scholar Bookstore for a Christmas book sale. A significant number of library staff participate in the annual spring service Day, several returning regularly to a Harrisburg ministry serving the destitute.

Of major significance is the Friends of Murray Library. Although funds raised to support special collections and student research is a major enhancement to the library and college community, this Friends connection also supports college development efforts by providing yet another way to help alumni and community members feel connected and informed about what is happening on campus. Often a library friends organization appeals to individuals who would not be interested in other contributing opportunities.

VIII. Space

Libraries are the intellectual commons where users interact with ideas in both physical and virtual environments to expand learning and facilitate the creation of new knowledge.

The ACRL statement above says it all, and describes the venture that Murray Library is embarking upon. I realize that the public service staff had previously put much consideration into the placement of the circulation and reference functions. As an outsider, I was impressed with the energy of the library as I walked into the front entrance and saw the computer area in front of me with students actively engaged in research - - well, they looked as if it were researching! To the right was the café, also a quietly active place. Students seemed more interested in the various seating options they were using for study, so engagement wasn't necessarily food related. This space also fulfills the social definition of a learning commons.   I had a chance to observe this area several times during my visit, and each time I was impressed with the use of the café for study. The collaborative study rooms were popular and always filled, and I understand there will be more.   The circulation desk was obvious as a location for assistance, and the way it is designed to combine with a research service area was good as well, except…..from some angles the research desk was not obvious because of the pillar. Whether to have a reference/research desk and whether a librarian's time is better spent on other goals has been discussed earlier in this report. However, one reason libraries still staff the desk is because of the recognition factor. The pillar obscures this purpose.

One member at the library support staff meeting perfectly echoed my thoughts about the building renovation. As she was scanning Dr. Shill's outside review from 2006 for me several weeks before my visit, she noted that his building recommendations were very different from the Murray Library of today, or the plans for the building in the future. Dr. Shill is a respected building consultant and his detailed analysis and report a good one. However, ideas about a physical library and the purpose it should serve change rapidly and this difference in your plans emphasizes the fact that library buildings of the future must be flexible and mobile enough to adjust to trends and demands.

The Library Faculty Committee spoke of their excitement over the new appearance of the library. They mentioned that it had been a long time coming, and one member said that the library had been "languishing" for years. To walk into the building and see this new concept was exciting for them as well as for the rest of the college population. It made a progressive statement about what a library could and should be.

The promise of a learning commons takes work. The literature on the subject often mentions that the physical planning of the space can trump what will actually go on there when construction is finished. A library staff is usually especially suited in bringing people and ideas together collaboratively. However, I do feel that strategic planning is necessary to do so because this library concept often requires that staff think of their roles in new ways. Library space has always been very political, and any flooring that didn't hold book stacks was often sought by different college constituencies. The literature uses the word "transformative" when describing the potential of a learning commons. If ways are not found for users to interact with information in new ways through the commons concept, then the library merely becomes a place that just houses other campus offices.

9

I hope that the campus and library can move forward with the commons approach. It is my understanding that there will be two more phases, and that library spaces utilized for non-library/commons purposes will be re-evaluated.   Another of the ACRL trends states, "Technology continues to drive much of the futuristic thinking within academic libraries." This coupled with an additional trend, "Mobile devices are changing the way information is delivered and accessed," necessitates the need for a strong IT support presence within the learning commons space.

A final ACRL trend emphasizes that students expect convenience in all aspects of their information seeking. This not only applies to the library's physical space, but also to its virtual space. I like the simplicity and clarity of the Murray Library website that serves as an instructional tool. As a marketing device, I suggest more visuals with students in the rotation of images.

IX. Conclusion

The Murray Library is a well-run library with a dedicated and professional staff. These staff members are experienced and very knowledgeable about how their community uses information services. Although there is room for a closer partnership with IT in the new physical space, matters are much improved since the last review. This is extremely important as information and technology move forward together into the 21st century.

The book collection itself poses an interesting dilemma. As opposed to many libraries that feel their unused books with declining circulation rates are filling space that could be used more profitably, the use of the Messiah collection is high, yet there is an extreme space shortage to house it. It is clear that investing in the growth, quality, and assessment of the collection is valuable, but strategizing solutions for making the collection physically available is definitely necessary.

A constructive plan for assessment is in place and is being practiced by the library. Comparative library data from other institutions was studied extensively in the 2006 outside review. Reasons for placing schools on these lists vary and I would suggest a serious discussion with administrators about how the institution utilizes this list of comparative schools, and what the concrete possibilities are of looking at aspects of this data such as budget allocations and staff salaries for re-evaluation. I would see the Library Faculty Committee as playing a role in this discussion. An internal examination within Messiah as to salary comparisons with other units and the positioning of the library would also be valuable.

There is much optimism about the learning commons concept, and a positive feeling about the attention focused on the library. With completion of the third phase of Murray Library renovation, the vision of a learning commons expressed in McMullen's publication *US Academic Libraries: Today's Learning Commons Model* (OECD 2008) will have been accomplished. Understandably, the library staff is uncertain about what

10

the future holds, but they are positive about their contributions. I strongly recommend that their views be heard and incorporated in phase two and three of the renovation. The strength of the existing instruction program should continue to be valued by the institution, and the appropriate teaching space allocated. The need for research literacy and critical use of information will remain a strong one - - just as strong as what a learning commons approach offers your campus. My hope for the library is that it becomes a confident, dominant partner and leader in making the commons approach work in new ways.