

**External Review Team Report  
University of Massachusetts Amherst  
December 3-4, 2007**

**Overview**

A four person team of library professionals was invited to UMass Amherst to review the self-study prepared by the Libraries in preparation for your NEASC (New England Association of Schools and Colleges) institutional ten-year accreditation in 2008. As part of this process, we were invited to analyze the Libraries' self-assessment documents, make a site visit, help evaluate the progress you have made in achieving your mission, and to provide insight into your future directions. The members of the external review team were Camila Alire, Dean Emerita at the University of New Mexico and Colorado State University; Carol Pitts Diedrichs, Dean of Libraries at the University of Kentucky; Susan Perry, Director of Programs & Senior Advisor, Mellon Foundation; and Lizabeth (Betsy) Wilson, Dean of University Libraries at the University of Washington.

A three year strategic plan, *Re-Imagining UMass Amherst Libraries*, was established in September 2004, which laid a clear roadmap for the 2005-2007 fiscal years. That plan is remarkable in its clarity and focus. The accomplishments from 2004 to 2007 are summarized in annual bulleted lists for each year. The success of this three year plan also is revealed in the implementation of the Learning Commons and the results of the 2007 LibQUAL Survey.

In preparation for the next three year plan, the Libraries conducted a self study in 2007 as well as compiling two reports focused on (1) service to undergraduates and (2) serving the graduate and research missions. These environmental scans and recommendations for next steps were the primary focus of our site visit.

**Strengths**

The UMASS Amherst Libraries have many strengths. One major strength is the existence of dedicated librarians and staff who have a significant commitment to the University and the Libraries. You were described to us by the Research Libraries Council as "agile, responsive, creative, collaborative and can do." In addition, we observed a strong sense of respect among the various members of the staff and a great willingness to work together for the good of UMass students and faculty. We were impressed particularly with the clear focus on the needs of students and faculty and a willingness to collaborate across campus to advance the mission of the university. In addition, you have:

- A robust organizational culture that has been transformed by the leadership of Jay Schafer. Jay and his senior staff have created an environment which engages in transparent decision-making and communicates well to all librarians and staff. The staff themselves uses the term "transformative" to describe the changes that have occurred in the last few years.
- A good foundation of assessment and analysis. Throughout the libraries, data and other forms of assessment have been used to make important decisions about new initiatives and needed changes to existing programs.
- Have arisen like the proverbial phoenix from a period of great budget difficulty, you have marshaled a very limited set of resources, defined a very clear focus for the use of those

resources, and delivered on those investments. We were very impressed with the laser focus of the just concluded strategic plan. This clear set of goals and implementation strategies has allowed you to accomplish much.

- A rapid and efficient transition to electronic access for journal literature. You have clearly engaged in what we would define as best practice in the process of review of current subscriptions using usage and cost data to drive decisions.
- Policies and practices related to interlibrary loan which effectively balance on-site collections with materials provided by consortial partners expeditiously and quickly.
- A clear focus in Special Collections on building collections in African American History and movements of peace and social justice.

These strengths form a firm foundation on which to build for the future.

## Next Steps

The Three Year Plan (2005-2007) focused on three strategic areas: information resources; a user-focused service environment; and the library as place. It is entirely feasible for the next three year plan to have sustained continuity with these same three strategic areas. However, underneath those general strategic areas, the particular implementation strategies may take a new focus informed by the recently completed self-study reports.

The two self-study reports focused on undergraduates and on the graduate and research missions are thorough, comprehensive, and ambitious. The undergraduate report leaves virtually no stone unturned in surveying the landscape and options for next steps. The graduate report is less extensive but reflects the current state of thinking and understanding of how to provide a changing set of services for graduate students and faculty. In seeking a focus from the variety of great ideas in those reports, we recommend that you ask yourselves several key questions as you consider implementation strategies:

- What is it that you must do at the local level – activities that simply must be done locally? A good example is liaison activities with the faculty.
- What can you do with the Five Colleges consortium or other groups with whom you collaborate?
- What can be done at the network (national or regional) level?

In our opinion, UMass Amherst Libraries should establish four areas of focus for its next three year plan:

- **Information resources:** Stabilize the funding foundations and growth needs of the collections budget
- **User-focused service environment:** Implement an enhanced information literacy program
- **Library as place:** Develop spaces in support of the graduate and research mission
- **Organizational development:** Develop training and other programs which will enable librarians and staff to acquire the skills needed to advance the Libraries' initiatives

**Information resources:** *Stabilize the funding foundations and growth needs of the collections budget*

After the devastating state budget reductions of 2002, the UMass campus has clearly invested its own resources in rebuilding the collection budget for the Libraries. However, that foundation relies heavily on one-time funding rather than recurring, base allocations. While the library has done well working in this environment to extend its collections, stable, reliable recurring budget increases are needed to move the Libraries forward. Currently the Libraries spend about 80% of their collections budget on recurring costs such as journals and databases. The annual cost increases at this level will quickly outpace your budget. The Libraries have transitioned the collection largely from a print journal base to an electronic one. As a result, the savings which are available in that process have largely been realized.

The University needs to stabilize the funding base for the collections budget and provide a mechanism for adding recurring funds to that base each year to support cost increases. (At least one of our libraries, University of Kentucky, is providing new funding to the Libraries specifically for new faculty hires in the humanities and social sciences for the purpose of providing “start-up” funds for purchasing needed library collections resources.) Your LibQUAL results make a clear articulation of faculty needs – to increase print collections, to add e-journal backfiles, to fill gaps in the collections, and to have more current subscriptions (rather than access through aggregators which often involve embargoes on the current issues of the journals). One faculty member noted “our electronic resources are not sufficient to meet our needs and we are hindered in our ability to conduct competitive research because of this lack of resources.”

**User-focused service environment:** *Implement an enhanced information literacy program*

The UMass Libraries have never focused on information literacy as a comprehensive program. The University’s General Education Council has committed to the inclusion of information literacy in the general education curriculum and a campus dialog about what that means must be the next step. While a comprehensive program does not exist, there have certainly been good, effective examples of information literacy incorporated in the Junior Writing Requirement which many (but not all) of the subject liaisons do with their faculty counterparts. But as is the case on most campuses, participation (from both the teaching faculty and the librarians) has been differential. We concur with the recommendation in the undergraduate self-study report that a campus-wide conversation on information literacy needs to be initiated.

The UMass Libraries will be well-challenged to implement an ambitious and expanded information literacy program without an infusion of new librarians and staff or the redirection of existing librarians and staff. We believe that there are still areas where changes in focus can permit the redirection of staffing to these new endeavors. A key question to be asked is where are your fixed costs (for example, in the number of service desks being maintained) and how might service be provided in order to eliminate some of those fixed costs so that the freed resources can be redirected to new and more strategic initiatives? We note that your ARL statistics report 17 service points, what seems to be a very high number for an institution of your size and number of library facilities.

However, adding one or two new positions in key areas would provide the new skills and initiative fundamental to moving this goal forward. The Libraries feel comfortable that you can support the First Year Experience course with existing resources. However, to have a real impact on the junior writing course and the capstone course will require a much greater engagement by

librarians and staff with the teaching faculty in the design of information literacy components to those courses. Additional and redirected staffing will be needed to accomplish this goal.

While we speak most strongly of the need for a formal information literacy program, there was also clear call in the LibQUAL results from graduate students for increasing the number of workshops available and increasing the visibility of lesser known services provided by the library. They also note that “more discipline-centered group workshops with the research librarian assigned to our field would be a good way to open up communication between students and librarians.”

**Library as place:** *Develop spaces in support of the graduate and research mission*

Building on the success of the Learning Commons, the UMass Amherst Libraries are poised to create meaningful space for the graduate and research mission to be accomplished. An existing space – the 16<sup>th</sup> floor writing center for faculty in the Du Bois Library – is an excellent example of what can be done. Your own LibQUAL results support the need for new environments in the Libraries for graduate students and faculty and those requests mirror a growing national trend to re-envision library spaces for those users. There is also strong support and a call for a research commons or “some area dedicated to support research” in the LibQUAL data.

The Du Bois Library is a very difficult facility. Thus far, you have made remarkable progress in finding ways to make it more inviting and hospitable. There are several key barriers which must be addressed in order to advance this initiative:

- Provide additional storage for print material off site so that more valuable campus space can be converted to user space.
- Refocus how service is delivered and by whom. Build on the successful models in other areas of campus such as the peer tutors and supplemental instruction. Using this model, front line service could be provided by students which would enable the librarians to focus on engagement with the faculty in course development and information literacy.
- Provide space in the Learning Commons for faculty to hold office hours. You have been told that those faculty members who hold their office hours in the Learning Commons routinely see more students than when they hold them in their offices.

With these issues resolved, you could develop a graduate student commons which might include:

- Enforced quiet areas for work and study
- A place to store belongings
- Wireless in the tower to make carrels more useful
- A graduate student lounge for social activities and group work
- More advanced software support

The UMass Libraries have a good understanding of what this segment of your user groups want in a space; you just need to resolve the barriers above, find a place to house the graduate commons, design it, fund it, and deliver it. The success of the Learning Commons assures us that you can deliver an equally appealing space for the graduate students and faculty with adequate resources and support.

**Organizational development:** *Develop training and other programs which will enable librarians and staff to acquire the skills needed to advance the Libraries' initiatives*

Currently, staff development activities are largely focused on self-identified training and development needs. In order to refresh skills, add new skills, and develop new services, it would be reasonable for the Libraries to focus on organizational development and in particular, identify needed skills for librarians and staff as a whole in order to support new initiatives and programs and then implement a training program. Your plans to participate in the Organizational Climate and Diversity Assessment (OCDA) project in spring 2008 are a good step. All of your plans and strategic agendas will require a strong, skilled and ever evolving staff. We have included this as the fourth strategy but it is effectively an enabling strategy for the three strategies above.

### **Additional Issues**

#### *Integrated Science and Engineering Library*

In contrast to the Learning Commons in the Du Bois Library, the ISEL needs to be dramatically modernized. This library serves 50% of the campus community and appears to be very dated and uninviting. We recommend a particular consideration of the following issues:

- Consolidate so that there is a single service point on the first floor
- Weed the reference collection in order to provide more seating, computers and group study spaces
- Implement the lessons learned from the Du Bois Library Learning Commons in this facility
- Expand hours of service

#### *Cyberinfrastructure for the Sciences*

Considerable national attention is now focused on the needs of all disciplines for cyberinfrastructure. In particular, the research community on most campuses has extensive data to be managed, controlled, accessed and preserved. Discussions on the UMass campus have been initiated without great interest and concern about the need for a central plan. In our experience, the need to develop this infrastructure and the role of the library in that process is gaining considerable traction. We recommend that a campus conversation with library involvement would be a good next step for UMass.

#### *Scholarly Communication and ScholarWorks*

UMass Amherst Libraries have done a good job of holding forums and workshops to expand understanding on campus about scholarly communications issues. This work must continue as it is a long-term issue which will require much time to effect change. However, there are aspects which can be advanced by partnerships with the research enterprise on campus including support for requiring the deposit of research products in the institutional repository, ScholarWorks. Given the importance of research on your campus and the need for significant cyberinfrastructure to support the sciences as well as social sciences and humanities is a strategic issue for your campus and the Libraries. Allocating your resources – time, human, IT infrastructure, and

financial – to expanding ScholarWorks should be given serious consideration in this next strategic plan.

### *Next Steps for the Learning Commons*

The Learning Commons cannot become stagnant. It must continue to develop and evolve to meet changing student needs. Reasonable next steps might include more programming and events, more multimedia software and assistance and more software application support. In addition, the Learning Resource Center model for peer tutors could be implemented in the Learning Commons to provide drop-in or review sessions with a focus on skill development such as finding library resources for research projects, developing a multimedia component to your project etc. Another welcome addition would be presentation rooms – places where students can practice their class presentations using the equipment they will have available to them in the classroom.

### *Taking Resources to Where the Users Are*

Faculty and students use a variety of online resources to locate information – many of those are resources not under the control of the university library, e.g. Google Scholar, Wikipedia, etc. So a key question is how can the UMass Libraries maximize and surface your resources where the users are? This approach to the issue goes far beyond our usual one of buying more and more databases and creating digital content. A key focus would be ensuring that those library resources can be found by users in the places they already go looking for information.

### *Digitization and Born Digital Content*

The UMass Libraries have done a good job of focusing the scope of your special collections in areas in which you have existing strength of collections. The UMass Libraries would make an exceptional contribution to scholarship and learning if it were to work collaboratively with other libraries that hold Du Bois special collections to create a comprehensive virtual digital collection. Some digitization projects have begun. However, what does not yet exist is any organized strategic plan for digitization – what should you be digitizing, how will it be accomplished, what is the status of born digital content across campus?

### *Professional Engagement*

The excellent work of the UMass Amherst Libraries will go largely unknown outside Amherst if your librarians and staff are not encouraged to make presentations and publish scholarly work outside the university. This will expand the professional development of the individual members of the staff but also spread the word about the successes of the UMass Libraries to the world. You should receive national exposure and recognition for your work.

### *ARL Rankings*

In 2007, the ARL began using a new set of criteria and factors to formulate the ARL rankings. The new mechanism focuses on expenditure data rather than the increasingly out of date index used previously which was very collections-centric.

The new index – called the expenditures index – uses the following weighted measures:

- Total library expenditures
- Salaries and wages of professional staff
- Total library materials expenditures
- Number of professional plus support staff

The most simplistic answer to the question – how can the UMass ranking be improved? – is the expenditure of new dollars especially for collections and staffing.

## **Conclusion**

It has been our pleasure to provide this review and set of recommendations for the UMass Amherst Libraries. As with all such reports, the primary focus is on areas of improvement and reconsideration. However, the strengths and assets of your Libraries are extensive and cause for pride. This report is intended to help you continue to move forward and build on those considerable strengths. It is also not possible to understand every nuance of a library system on a short site visit. Inevitably there are some errors and misinterpretations of your policies and practices in this report. Please correct any errors while also recognizing that the brevity of our visit may have contributed to their presence in this report.

*Camila Alire  
Carol Pitts Diedrichs  
Susan Perry  
Lizabeth Wilson  
January 21, 2008*