

Minutes of the University Senate Library Services Committee Meeting on 3/10//2011

Members Present: (in alphabetical order) Hongshik Ahn, Jay Bock, Bushra Butt, Floris Cash, Bill Godfrey, Lindsey Levitan, Judy Lochhead, Bob Shrock (Chairperson), Lin-Shu Wang

Members Absent: Bushra Butt, Fiona Grady, Steve Koch, Jason Torre

Invited from Library: Acting Dean and Director of Libraries, Andrew White

The committee members first approved the minutes from the Feb. 10, 2011 meeting, where we had heard the co-chairpersons of the Library Faculty Committee, Aimee de Chambeau and Kristen Nyitray, discuss and elaborate on the contents of the letter of protest that they submitted to the library administration in the late fall of 2010 and to our committee.

Our committee had invited the acting Dean and Director, Dr. Andrew White, to respond to the criticism made in this letter and also to the criticisms made by the three members of our committee from the library, Bushra Butt, Fiona Grady, and Jason Torre (who reported that they were also conveying the opinions of others on the library staff). Andrew White agreed to our invitation and came to our meeting. The major focus of the meeting was a frank response by Dr. White to the criticisms and our questions to him in light of this response. Instead of an imperfect transcription of Andrew White's verbal remarks, we invited him to summarize his response in written form. He has done this, and we include it verbatim here:

The written reponse from Andrew White to our committee follows:

Bob,

Thank you for the invitation and opportunity to explain the activities surrounding the reorganization of the Melville Library staffing and to address the concerns raised by some of the library's faculty.

First, I'll respond to the letter issued by the library faculty's Appointment and Promotion (AP) Committee with respect to their role in recent internal recruitments. During the late summer/early fall of 2010, internal recruitments for two faculty positions were conducted with guidance from Human Resources Services and the Provost's Office. Search committees for the two positions consisted of 5 individuals, 3 from the library staff and 2 from the campus faculty. Since the recruitments were internal, the finalists for both positions were already in the faculty ranks and had previously been vetted by the AP committee long before these internal searches were conducted.

When I was asked by the AP committee for their inclusion in the recruitment process, I contacted both HR (Human Resources) and the the Provost's Office for clarification of procedure. I was informed that internal recruitments in other departments reporting to the

Provostial area do not require input from a separate AP committee. For example, the naming of a department chair within the College of Arts and Sciences does not include input from a separate departmental AP committee, as the chair is already a member of the faculty, determined at the point of initial hire to the department within the University.

There may also be a possibility that the library's internal AP committee is an anomaly amongst departments reporting to the Provost. While I have not conducted thorough research into the existence of comparable departmental committees within the College of Arts and Sciences, some members of your Senate Committee did find the presence of the library's AP (committee) to be questionable.

To the issue of staff morale, there are multiple sources of concern for the staff particularly as the libraries plan on restructuring and work towards an administrative merger of the Melville and Health Science Libraries. While there is much uncertainty with many operational changes, not just in the library, but on the campus as a whole, there needs to be a greater recognition that cooperation and flexibility to change will help clarify the shape of necessary modifications to the library organization and functions. To date, since June 2009 the Melville Library staff count was reduced by 11 through early retirements and disciplinary actions. Under the President's Expenditure Reduction Plan and the procedures associated with the Campus Budget Working Group, the Library was only allowed to refill the vacated building manager position through on-campus only recruitments. With such staffing reductions, it is imperative that the staff as a whole realize that changes in staffing structure and responsibilities are inevitable, regardless of whether there is an interim or permanent dean of libraries. The recommendation made by some staff that the reorganization should be halted until a permanent dean is named appears to deny the reality that changes in job duties are unavoidable. During the year in which I've served as Interim Dean, there have been two investigations, conducted by Human Resources and Labor Relations of past library staff and student personnel practices. Last week, Internal Audit also questioned some of the financial procedures that had been in place for years within the library. Clearly, improvements and alternations are in order as we continue to re-examine how the library operates. Given the current New York State and campus budget situation, as well as the Project 50 Forward initiative, there is no time to wait for find a perfect set of conditions before making changes in the library. As a corollary, we should avoid the notion that we need to identify a new staffing structure that is not only perfect for the now but will still be relevant in the next 5 years. The library and staff should be able to adapt procedure, policy, and job responsibilities to better respond to the technological changes affecting the formats, distribution, and accessibility of information that will occur in the near future.

I would like to note that it is also important that the library increase its interaction directly with those people it serves. The shift to digital collections has dramatically reduced the need for many individuals to physically enter the library and interact face-to-face with its staff. The resulting increased detachment from the library's services fosters an environment in which the library and its staff can easily assume that the operational status quo is acceptable. While the Library Services Committee has historically invested much time lobbying campus administration in support of library budgets, I would encourage the committee to devise ways to measure library performance and the quality of service

beyond the annual Association of Research Library statistics. Such information will help guide the changes needed to develop more efficient procedures and staff responsibilities as we move forward in an ever increasing digital information environment.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew White, Ph.D., Interim Dean and Director of Libraries,

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Here ends the written response from the Interim Dean and Director of Libraries, Andrew White. During the meeting, several members of our committee emphasized to Dr. White the low state of morale among the library staff and their demand for greater transparency. He indicated that he was aware of this morale problem and of the demand for greater transparency. (The newsletter memo that he sent out to the library subsequent to the meeting is a step in the direction of better communication from the library management to the staff.)

In general, our committee meetings have candidly discussed the concerns of the library faculty and staff and have also heard the view of the library management. It is hoped that our meetings have helped to improve the situation, and we will continue to monitor this in the future.

These minutes were taken by the committee Chairperson, Prof. Shrock.