

Sept. 14, 2012

Executive Summary of Stony Brook University Senate Library Services Committee Activities During the 2011-2012 Academic Year

The responsibility of our University Senate Library Services Committee is to advise on all aspects of the library. We have representatives on our committee from Humanities and Fine Arts, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Engineering, and the Melville and Health Science Libraries. At our meetings we have received updates on the status of the library from the library representatives on our committee and, at certain times, also from interim Dean and Director of the university library, Dr. Andrew White. A record of the activities of our committee is contained in the minutes of each of our meetings, which are deposited in the Senate Archives, and also in special letters from our committee to Dr. White.

The library has undergone extensive reorganization under Dr. White, following the recommendations of an earlier external review committee and visiting committee. This has involved an ongoing merger of many aspects of the Health Sciences and Melville Libraries. There have also been improvements in the library web interface and online catalogue and search engine with which users can locate library resources.

We discussed a number of important issues in our meetings during the 2011-2012 academic year. A continuing issue has been the funding for the library, and how the funds are allocated for the purchases of digital resources and access on the one hand, and for conventional library assets, such as books (and CD's for the music library) on the other hand. Some publishers of scientific and biomedical journals, such as Elsevier, have increased their subscription prices much more rapidly than inflation for many years. This has had a considerable impact on the allocation of library funds. We appreciate the additional funding that the administration allocated last year for the library to address this issue.

The three members of our committee from the Melville Library, Jason Torre, Fiona Grady, and Bushra Butt, communicated to us a number of concerns that the library staff have had with the reorganization of the library. Among these concerns has been, first, the issue of transparency and communication by the Dean and Director of the Library with the librarians and library staff regarding decisions on, and implementation of, changes in library operations. Another often-voiced concern has been that personnel in the library have been assigned new responsibilities but have not always received what they considered to be adequate on-the-job training to carry out these new tasks. We understand that Dean White has made an effort to address these concerns.

A particular issue that occupied our time last year was the issue of procedures for appointment, promotion, and tenure in the library. Early in the fall of 2011, the interim Dean

and Director, Dr. White, sent a letter of concern to Senate President, Prof. Fred Walter, with a copy to the Provost, pertaining to this issue. We communicated with the parties involved and had detailed discussions of this issue in our committee meetings throughout the fall and via various email exchanges. In particular, as Chairperson, I communicated results of our committee discussions to Prof. Walter and, at his request, gave a presentation of the relevant issues at a Senate Executive Council meeting on Monday, Oct. 3, 2011. One of our committee members, Jason Torre, also made a presentation at that meeting. This issue remains important, since it is connected with the continuing search for a Dean and Director of the Stony Brook University Libraries (with Dr. White continuing as the interim Dean and Director).

With the departure of several science/engineering librarians last year, the Melville library has had a significant shortage of specific science/engineering librarians. We discussed this at length in our committee meetings and, as Chair, I have discussed it several times with Sherry Chang. Sherry has given us very helpful information on the possibility of hiring new science librarians.

Another major issue that our committee dealt with was a memo that Dean and Director Andrew White submitted to the Provost in Dec. 2011 regarding new procedures for discarding books and other items in the library that were deemed to be “no longer needed”. This memo also recommended enforcement of penalties for failure to return books, including penalties for faculty members. Our committee strongly supported this second part of the memo, but raised a number of concerns with the part of the memo pertaining to the discarding of library items. We discussed this intensively at a special meeting of our during the January intersession, and a few days later, on Feb. 3, the Chairperson, together with Profs. Godfrey and Koch, had a special meeting with Dean White concerning this memo. At this meeting we communicated our concerns with the memo. These concerns included a lack of clear definition in the memo of the terms “no longer needed”, and a lack of any mention in the memo of procedures for oversight and appeal before the discarding of library items. The Chairperson had several subsequent communications with the Dean concerning this memo, requesting that our committee receive a revised memo that responded to our concerns and suggestions. We also invited Dean White to address our committee on the subject of the memo, which he did on March 29, 2012. We then sent him our committee response in a letter on the same day, in which we reiterated our support for the enforcement of rules regarding returning items on time and levying of penalties on faculty, as well as others, for failure to do so. Our letter also stated our committee’s recognition of the need to cut costs and save money that was being expended on storing library items offsite and our support for necessary “weeding” of unneeded library items, but reiterated some concerns with the procedures in the original form of the memo regarding this weeding process.

In addition to these issues, our committee also continued to discuss a central part of our Senate charge, namely to optimize the manner in which the library serves its users. This topic has an obvious overlap with some of the previous items, in particular, funding for purchasing books, e-books, and online access to scholarly journals. Our discussions also

dealt with storage of volumes in off-campus facilities when there is insufficient space in the on-campus library buildings, the interlibrary loan program, installation of more computer terminals for students, and library hours, both in the central and branch libraries.

In a final meeting during spring, 2012, the committee voted unanimously to reappoint Prof. Shrock for another term as the Chairperson. There were two personnel changes at the end of the academic year. Julitta Jo completed her term on the committee. On behalf of the committee, we would like to thank her for her excellent attendance at our meetings and her valuable input to our deliberations. Julitta is replaced by a new member, Dr. Pamela Noack, from the Dept. of Health Care and Policy Management in our School of Health, Technology, and Management. Second, among our representatives from the Social and Behavioral Sciences, Prof. Floris Cash (Dept. of Africana Studies) completed her term. We thank Floris also for her valuable service to our committee. Floris is replaced by Prof. Oyeronke Oyewumi from the Sociology Dept.

This, then, is a summary of the main activities of our Stony Brook University Senate Library Services Committee during the 2011-2012 academic year.

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