

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
FACULTY SENATE
LIBRARY COMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT FOR SPRING 2009

The charges to the Faculty Senate Library Committee included:

- 1) consulting with the Library faculty on long-range needs of the Library and the adequacy of budget provisions to meet those needs;
- 2) proposing Senate action relating to the University Library

A) FINDINGS:

Based on our research, the Faculty Senate Library Committee finds the following conditions to be in place in the Library:

1) Most importantly, substantial budget cuts this year on already below level funding, continue a trend that have impacted the library's ability to serve the URI students and faculty in several ways:

a. Since June of 2008, the Library's staff has been significantly reduced, creating difficulty in its ability to serve students and faculty. 14 positions have been lost—including 10 staff and 4 faculty. It is increasingly difficult, and at times impossible, for URI libraries to maintain level of services the University has been accustomed to, or even have anyone available for helping faculty or students during certain operating hours. The Pell Library, for instance, has only 1 staff person and 2 paid student workers to service the entire library. Across the University Libraries hours and reference services have had to be cut, and there is limited staff available to catalog incoming material.

b. The reductions of serials within the Library has been significant. The serials budget was reduced by \$420,000.00 in the 2008/09 year. In the 2007/2008 fiscal year the cut was \$219,000.00.

c. The ability of the Library to teach General Education courses has suffered. 6 sections of LIB 120 (a General Education course) had to be cancelled in Fall, 2008 because there was no funding for per course instructors to cover some faculty duties so that the continuing faculty would be available to teach the classes. Four sections (2 of which were online) were again offered in Spring, 2009, but only because some faculty duties were re-assigned to graduate student employees, who are not professional librarians.

2. **Accreditation:** There is some concern that our accreditation as a "Research University" is in jeopardy because of an indirect link between library funding and "level of research activity." *While URI's Carnegie classification is not directly linked to the funding for the Libraries, a research university ought to maintain a research library.* In reviewing the NEASC Accreditation reports for 1987, 1997, and 2007, the adequacy of the collection is brought into question. Noticeably from the 2007 report: "for a university with a diverse and significant number of PhD. and masters degree programs the small and

declining collection is a concern.” The report from 1987 still holds true in its comment:

"Development has not been such as to provide the library requirements of substantial research activities. Serious attention will have to be paid to this issue if the university is indeed to increase its emphasis on research in a significant fashion.” This is reinforced by the 2007 report which states that “URI is substantially lower than many of our comparator institutions in staffing and collections.” For more on Carnegie classification you can visit:

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/index.asp>

As was addressed in the first point of this report, staffing continues to be a detriment to the Libraries' support of the University's mission. The adequacy of staffing has also been of concern to the accreditation teams over the three decades. For perspective:

In 1987: 6,213 undergraduates and 2,066 graduate students; continuing faculty 679; librarians 22 and 51 support staff.

In 1997: 9,008 undergraduates and 2,039 graduate students; continuing faculty 592; librarians 16 and 43 support staff.

In 2007: 10,336 undergraduate and 2,105 graduate students; continuing faculty 583; librarians 17 and 34 support staff.

This 2008-2009 year the number is 14.5 librarians and 24 support staff.

It is a bit discouraging to discover that the 1987 report noted that the "size of professional staff has not increased since 1970.” Staffing will continue to be a critical area with regards to accrediting the University.

3) Provost’s Committee on Re-Envisioning the Library: Provost DeHayes has formed another committee to re-envision the future of the Library. That committee, consisting of Assistant Vice Provost Laura Beauvais (Business), J. Burkhardt (CCE branch library director), A. Izenstark and Mary MacDonald (Instruction librarians), Janie Palm (IT), James Miller (Ocean Engineering), Stephanie Guertin, Lynn Derbyshire (COM), and a representative from our Faculty Senate Library Committee (Rosie Pegueros), is considering thinking of the library as a “Learning Commons.” The idea of a "Learning Commons" is that part of the library be will transformed into a place where students come willingly to extend their learning experience from their classes. The concept has students congregating in a specially designed space within the library that will have tables set with several chairs for informal study groups and with the computers or other electronic equipment necessary for their discussions. The students will have a less formal setting than the traditional library or classroom. TA's or professors may meet with them to further aid in their learning.

The Provost’s committee is considering transforming two different spaces for the Learning Commons: the first floor at the far end (North side) from the entrance which is now the periodical room, and the lower level. The argument for using these spaces is that since we have moved away from paper-based periodicals to electronic subscriptions there will be less need for a periodical room; likewise, books in the lower level stacks can be compressed into smaller shelves and space made available for the Learning Commons.

According to members on the Provost’s Committee, Learning Commons are very popular at other Universities currently. Some universities are spending considerable money transforming library spaces into Learning Commons. The members of the Provost’s committee agree that we do not have the means to spend much money on this conversion, but the Provost wants a report soon from the committee making a plan for creating one at URI so as to encourage donors.

Proponents of the Learning Commons argue for the change in the way students learn: Laptops, clickers, Blackberries and other electronic devices are in greater use by students even as the rate of reading books and traditional forms of learning decline. Students are, according to them, losing patience with class lectures and other traditional classroom experiences, preferring instead interactive learning experiences. The librarians on the committee seem very enthusiastic about the concept. Some have done research on Learning Commons and have even visited schools that have them. One committee member spent her sabbatical researching Learning Commons.

The Faculty Senate Library Committee is concerned that the taxed library faculty and staff will be overextended as an already undernourished budget will be re-focused on the immediacy of funding a Learning Commons without concern for sustainability.

B) RECOMMENDATIONS:

1) Regarding the Learning Commons in the Library, we suggest that the Faculty Senate request a comparison of other institutions with established Learning Commons to assess feasibility of establishing a similarly sustainable program here at URI.

2) It is clear that the Library needs adequate resource allocations in order to continue the level of service demanded of it by the students and faculty. Given that adequate funding does not seem to be generated by recent Capital Campaigns, we suggest that the University encourage earmark funding for the library from **any** gifts received by the University. We recommend a base percentage of gifts (perhaps _ to 2 percent) mandatorily be assigned to the library.

3) It has been noted that the Library was not mentioned in the University’s own strategic plan. Again from the 2007 accreditation report: “Because of resource constraints and without regular and systemic evaluation of the library or information technology the library has suffered and more attention needs to be paid to planning for its needs in the future.” This gives a clear directive to include the Library in University wide strategic planning. We suggest the Library be fully accounted for in future strategic plans.

4) The Faculty Senate Library Committee recommends periodic review of URI’s research classification and the adequacy of library funding for collection development.