

SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY PLANNING

Academic Unit Review – Summary

Academic Unit: Libraries and Archives

Site Visit	22-23 March 2010
Date of Report	April 2010
Informal Response to Planning	June 2010
Formal Response to Planning	October 2010
Implementation Update	Expected Winter 2012
Midterm Review	Expected Fall 2015

Summary of Libraries and Archives Self-Study

The Self-Study document provides an overview of the Libraries and Archives' history and goals; place within the university; organizational structure; staff responsibilities; infrastructure; collections and holdings; services and programs; and archives. Data is provided for staffing levels, reference inquiries, visitors, items used and circulated, collections, acquisitions budget, ILL borrowing vs. lending; and instructional sessions. The document outlines the opportunities and challenges facing the unit.

Particular challenges identified by the Self-Study include the increasing cost of serials and concomitant reduction in funds available to purchase other materials (monographs, scores, audio/visual materials, etc.); a lack of adequate resources to support the Archives; and the need to complete the RECON project and process gift materials. There are also important infrastructure and space issues that need to be addressed.

With respect to staffing, upcoming retirements mean that succession planning is vital in Technical Services. The loss of a Librarian position has put added strain on the Public Services area, particularly in the area of information literacy. In Access Services, the high reliance on sessional employees who work eight months of the year means that the area is severely taxed during the summer.

Summary of External Reviewers' Report

The reviewers found a vibrant and positive academic culture on campus, with a number of renewal and development processes underway. These provide opportunities for the library to engage with the rest of the campus to bring this positive culture into the library. External users of the library have a high regard for its contributions to the campus, a desire to work with the Libraries and Archives,

and a high regard for the vision of the University Librarian. There is a readiness at the highest levels of the university to support and fund new approaches to teaching, learning, and research, but little desire to continue to support library processes that may have contributed to the university in the past but without updating will not serve it adequately into the future. Many individuals commented on a disconnect between the library and the rest of campus, with librarians seen as barriers to, rather than enablers of, campus-wide initiatives and change.

The R.P. Bell Library structure is tired and dysfunctional. Collections have not been adequately weeded and staff spaces have not been adjusted as processes have changed. A comparative lack of technology was noted and much of the technology in place is outdated. The reviewers were struck by a lack of visible collaborative activity, both among students and with other campus services in the library. The almost invisible IT help desk was seen as symbolic of a declaration of sovereignty over library space by staff and of the marginalization of peer help in the library. For these reasons, the review team strongly supports the establishment of a Centre for Engaged Learning, as is being discussed.

The reviewers praised the significant contribution to students in terms of personalized learning but expressed concern that new directions were not being supported and that the evolving role of librarianship does not seem to be having an impact in the unit. While the reviewers frequently heard that there was a lack of resources with which to advance new initiatives, they do not share this view. On the basis of Canadian benchmark data and the resources available to the reviewers in their own institutions, Mount Allison's resourcing of its Libraries and Archives is strong. New initiatives will likely attract new funding. The unit needs to reassess and reallocate its existing resources; for example, the expense of RECON work must be weighed against new initiatives with greater impact. The reviewers noted a lack of a functioning decision-making process and a broadly agreed upon strategic vision.

Given the significant concerns that they heard with respect to large, strategic issues, the reviewers have focused their recommendations on these issues and chose not to address the entire breadth of ideas and opinions in other areas heard during the site visit. Instead, recommendations were made in the following six areas:

1. **Organizational Culture:** the reviewers note that a culture of disrespect, uncivil behaviour, and insubordination prevails in the library. As a result, matters are not discussed openly and with respect for divergent opinions. As result, support staff are often caught in difficult situations without direction to proceed and individual staff members and librarians have isolated themselves. It seems that no staff or librarians below the University Librarian see themselves as having a leadership role in change. The reviewers recommend external assistance to help the library move to a more supportive, collegial culture that values personal leadership.

2. **Library Council and Community Engagement:** the reputation of Library Council both inside and outside the library is poor; it is seen as a barrier to getting work done. Some librarians anticipate its meetings with dread and anxiety. The reviewers recommend that a new committee should be formulated to guide the Libraries and Archives on institutional priorities and directions. This committee should have representation from academic leaders, deans, students, administrators from peer service bodies, information technology, the University Librarian, and librarians.
3. **Strategic Plan:** one should be developed that is in alignment with institutional planning documents.
4. **Comprehensive Services:** professional resources should be realigned to simplify subject based specialization and reduce task overlap. A model that may differ from the traditional liaison librarian one should be considered.
5. **Technology:** a comprehensive vision needs to be developed and implemented.
6. **Space:** the main library building needs to be reconstituted as a true commons: a high-quality, student-focused learning environment built with meaningful partnerships to enhance and enrich the vision of the Centre for Engaged Learning and to revitalize the core services, resources, and professional expertise of the library.

Summary of Libraries and Archives Response

The Libraries and Archives response is in two sections, the second of which responds specifically to the six principal recommendations of the report. There is agreement that work needs to be done to improve communication, collaboration, and collegiality within the Libraries and Archives. Individual leadership is a learned skill that requires supportive structures and environments. There is support for the engagement of an external consultant. They would prefer not to establish a new committee external to the library but instead they propose inviting to Library Council representation from students, faculty, senior administrators, and members of peer service bodies. The librarians disagree that there is a lack of accountability to the community. They suggest that either a Senate-elected Librarian or the University Librarian be added to the membership of Academic Matters. There is support for a strategic planning exercise, to be conducted with the assistance of an external facilitator. The process will include a review of other models of service delivery. There is agreement that a comprehensive technological vision is needed. There is also support for the reconstitution of the building into a commons (a proposal originally made by the library in 2002).

The first section of the response addresses a number of factual errors and omissions in the report and expresses surprise and disappointment at its tone. Most found it to be unprofessional, disrespectful, and a challenge to the professional integrity of librarians and staff. They point out a number of areas where, in their view, the review team did not adequately fulfill its terms of reference: e.g., in evaluating the quality of research and scholarly activity. They also highlight a number of omissions

(Music Library, Archives, issues identified and discussed in the Self-Study) and areas where they feel that the report is incorrect (engagement of librarians, the role of Library Council, connections with external users, and the vision of academic librarianship). Some members of Library Council felt that the review team lacked professional diversity, since it consisted solely of University Librarians.

A response from the Libraries and Archives staff was included as an appendix to the report. The staff is strongly supportive of the concept of moving forward and suggest that their greatest asset is their willingness to change, to learn, and to grow. They include a number of good suggestions about how they can contribute to improving the library as a whole. In particular, staff would like to be involved in the development of the strategic plan.

Planning Committee and Provost Response

The Libraries and Archives' Self-Study is an excellent overview of the development of the unit in recent years, the opportunities that it has recently addressed, and those that it plans to address in the future. It is clear that the Libraries and Archives sees itself as a vital part of Mount Allison and contributing in many ways to the quality of the student experience. The leadership of the unit is to be commended in particular for its responsiveness to student and faculty concerns and suggestions. The Libraries and Archives provides significant support for, and personal attention to, students and faculty alike.

The Planning Committee recognizes that the external reviewers' report is not a perfect document in its tone and in some of its details. It is not unusual, however, to find errors and omissions in such documents, particularly when there is no extra-departmental Mount Allison member on the review committee. The unit's response also focuses on the reviewers' apparent lack of attention to some elements of the terms of reference for the review, including an assessment of research and scholarly activities. However, these terms of reference are generic and do not really apply directly to the Libraries and Archives. (Librarians have to undertake duties in the operation of the library that do not permit the same scope or extent of research and creative activities as that of faculty members, particularly when the Collective Agreement provides for a 35-hour week for librarians.)

Nevertheless, we agree that it would have been helpful to have said more about what the Libraries and Archives are doing well, about the excellence of its collection, as well as about entire functional areas such as the Archives and the Music Library. With respect to the latter, the Music Department review team did note in its external report that the collection is possibly the finest in Canada supporting an undergraduate music program. As a University, we value the Library and the contributions of professional librarians and staff and we understand that the role of a librarian encompasses more than simply being a manager of resources. This was not expressed adequately in the external reviewers' report.

However, the Committee is extremely concerned about the serious issues that are raised in the report, particularly those relating to collegiality, individual leadership and ownership, and the perceived disconnect between the Libraries and Archives and the rest of campus. Our overall sense is that the report provides a fair assessment of some hard truths about the Libraries and Archives. While some things are out of the direct control of the unit, the vast majority of them are not. In our written response after the informal response was provided to Planning, we encouraged the Libraries and Archives to take these concerns seriously and to seize the opportunity that the academic unit review process affords to move the unit forward in a constructive manner.

It was therefore disappointing that the response from the Libraries and Archives chose not to overlook the tone of the external report and engage productively with its substance. We do understand, however, latterly, that all librarians are not in full agreement with the response.

The Committee is particularly concerned about the impact of the environment on librarians and staff, particularly those more recently hired. We therefore strongly support bringing in an external consultant to assist the unit in addressing this issue.

On the positive side, it was good to see the evident commitment and engagement of MASA staff in the library. We are also pleased that the Library is willing to participate in the development of the Centre for Engaged Learning and look forward to its input as part of the partnership with the Provost, the Deans, Departments and Programs, Student Affairs, and the PCTC.

With respect to the proposed establishment of an advisory committee external to the Library, the Planning Committee does not support the Libraries and Archives' dismissal of it. While it may be a good idea to expand Library Council from time to time by bringing in external visitors, our sense is that this in itself would not address the perceived disconnect between the unit and the rest of campus. We recommend that Senate be asked to develop terms of reference for a Senate Library Committee, to be chaired by the Provost, with representative membership including students, faculty, librarians, and library staff. This Committee may be useful in helping the users understand the professional views and obligations of the librarians with respect to collections development and, ideally, will help better to align the two.

At various times over the past few years the Planning Committee has looked intensively at the Library budget and staffing. The Committee was pleased to have its assessment that the current resources, particularly with respect to staffing, are both adequate and appropriate validated by the external reviewers. The Library response cites some statistics from the *Canadian University Library Benchmark 2010* study that demonstrate that the number of professional librarians and support staff falls below both the average (8.46 librarians and 20.5 support staff) and the median

(7.63 librarians and 18.5 support staff). While this is true, the small size of Mount Allison makes this statistic misleading, as the second component of the table makes clear: the number of students per librarian or staff member. (The CACUL report, from which these data are taken, uses 2006/07 figures and excludes endowments and special purpose funds.)

Staffing	Librarians	Students/Librarian	Support Staff FTE	Students/Staff
Mean	8.46	761	20.5	286
Median	7.63	736	18.5	309
75 th percentile	9.28	894	26.3	361
25 th percentile	5.00	535	11.7	215
Mount Allison 2009/10	7.0	343	18.09	133
Mount Allison 2006/07	7.0	301	18.09	116

Other resource comparisons are equally instructive and support the reviewers' conclusions:

Overall Expenditures	Total expenditure	Per student	% of institutional total
Mean	\$3,234,516	\$637	4.48%
Median	\$2,733,327	\$464	4.42%
75 th percentile	\$4,023,076	\$722	4.82%
25 th percentile	\$1,925,533	\$421	3.87%
Mount Allison 2009/10	\$2,277,562	\$950	5.8%
Mount Allison 2006/07	\$2,110,086	\$1,002	6.2%

Distribution of Expenditures	Staffing expenditure/student	Staffing expend. as % of total library expend.	Expenditures on materials per student	Expenditure on materials as % of total library exp.
Mean	\$402	62.2%	\$213	35.2%
Median	\$308	60.7%	\$172	35.0%
75 th percentile	\$475	67.0%	\$238	39.0%
25 th percentile	\$242	57.3%	\$149	31.0%
Mount Allison 2009/10	\$602	68.8%	\$273	31.2%
Mount Allison 2006/07	\$606	60.4%	\$294	29.4%

Distribution of Salary Expenditures	Librarian salaries as % of total library salaries
Mean	37.9%

Median	38.6%
75 th percentile	42.8%
25 th percentile	32.7%
Mount Allison 2009/10	46.9%
Mount Allison 2006/07	50.0%

The Committee knows that a structural deficit does exist on the operating side of the Libraries and Archives and hopes that the financial sustainability exercise will offer a remedy to this problem. The acquisitions budget, on the other hand, has increased annually and is currently the largest in Mount Allison's history. We do recognize that there is a challenge with respect to materials acquisitions (as opposed to serials). This is a systemic issue, not unique to Mount Allison, that has at times been addressed by annual, one-time funds for monograph purchases. The Planning Committee would support doing this again in the future if funding permits.

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In light of the significant concerns and in particular those relating to collegiality, the Provost met with the Libraries and Archives on several occasions to discuss the report, including once before the informal response to the Planning Committee. The university is in the process of engaging an external consultant to assist the unit in addressing the dysfunctional environment; an initial meeting is planned in December.

The Provost is in full agreement with the Planning Committee's views. The Provost will oversee the completion of the Library Space Study and advocate for funding to make the necessary building changes. He will also endeavour to address the structural deficit through the budget process.

With respect to staffing, the Libraries and Archives needs to understand clearly that there is no vacant librarian position. One position no longer exists and has been removed from the budget. If Information Literacy is a priority for the Library, as it should be, then existing resources need to be deployed differently, as was suggested by the external reviewers.