

LIBRARY COMMITTEE REPORT FOR 2014-2015

Submitted by Mark Ashbaugh, Chair

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The Library Committee met on a monthly basis during the Academic Year 2014-15. This has been the practice of the committee for at least the last several years.

The first word that comes to mind to describe the sense of the Library Committee's work for the year has to be disappointment, in fact, deep disappointment in how the library administration handled the recovery from the mold problems which had occurred at the secondary depository (UMLD2) beginning in July or August, 2013. While we should have been treated as partners in working out the the libraries's response to the mold problem, and been working in concert with the library administration to resolve the most important issues, we were instead treated as an afterthought, a body to which the library administration would give (partial) explanations and rationalizations after the fact, when no important decisions remained. This was in stark contrast to the promises made to faculty by the library administration in Spring, 2014 (these promises were made to Faculty Council's Ad Hoc Committee on the Library Mold Issue, but it had been thought at the end of Spring 2014 that, given these promises, the regular campus Library Committee would carry on with the remainder of the work).

As we entered Fall of 2014, we knew that the major issue before the Library Committee would be the handling of the faculty's role in going over the Libraries's provisional lists of "to-be-discarded" books, journals, and other items, which the library administration had promised to provide faculty by September 1, 2014. Since faculty were to have "veto" power over the discarding of volumes, there needed to be in place a mechanism to get the lists out to faculty in a useful and relatively "user friendly" form, along with a convenient way for faculty to give feedback and input, and in particular to be able to save an item that an individual faculty member thought warranted it. This also needed to arrive back to the committee and library administration in a relatively streamlined form, so as to be directly usable in the decision-making. Unfortunately, none of this was to happen in the way that we as faculty had expected.

Our first indication that there were going to be problems was at the October 3 meeting of the committee, when a question about the lists and when they would be provided to faculty was met with an unexpectedly hostile and

aggressive response from Library administration. In effect, the argument was that the libraries had found more funding for saving items (books and other materials), that there were fewer volumes or other items on the “provisionally to be destroyed lists,” and that therefore providing such lists to faculty was no longer needed. To faculty this was a strange and unexpected response on several counts: (1) The expectation of the additional funds (via an outside grant from a foundation) had been common knowledge in Spring, 2014, and that had already been factored into the discussions in the spring as what would occur in the fall; (2) The fact that there were now fewer items to list for faculty on the provisionally-to-be-destroyed lists would only make the task of the libraries and its staff less, so that, having made the promise to provide the full lists in the spring the task had now gotten significantly easier. Why then was the library administration now objecting to providing the lists, when they’d agreed in the spring to provide them in the fall (even saying that they would be ready by September 1)? (3) Why, or how, could the library administration in good conscience unilaterally change the rules under which it operated in regard to cooperation with faculty on the promised faculty veto right over books that were on the libraries’s provisionally to-be-destroyed list(s)? If they thought it was appropriate to back away from their promise wouldn’t the good faith approach have been to meet with Faculty Council’s Ad Hoc Committee on the Library Mold Issue to try to negotiate a compromise agreement, *in advance of taking any decisions that expressly went against the promises made to that body in Spring, 2014?* Much later it was learned that the Libraries had already slated books and other items for destruction and gone ahead and destroyed them during the Summer of 2014 before there was time for any faculty input, or a chance for faculty to veto any of these decisions. Faculty were kept in the dark as to the decisions that were made in Summer 2014, and, indeed, well into Fall, 2014.

Coming out of the October 3 Library Committee meeting it was agreed that members of the Faculty Council Ad Hoc Committee on the Library Mold Issue would be invited to attend the next Library Committee meeting. In effect, the next Library Committee meeting was to be a joint meeting of the Library Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Library Mold Issue. In the ensuing meeting on October 30, 2014, there were heated exchanges over the prior promises by the library administration and what should be done going forward. It was agreed that the provisional lists were going to be provided after all. When asked about the details of the treatment to kill the mold (as carried out by the company in Texas that had been contracted to do this) and about any guarantees that we had for the future, scant details could be provided faculty at that time but it was asserted that the guarantee was “in perpetuity”. Many of us were incredulous at this statement, finding it unbelievable that any respectable company would put such a promise in writing without some qualifications or limiting provisions, and we asked that for the next meeting (also to be attended by members of the two committees) we be provided with the detailed contract that had been signed with the Texas company.

In the aftermath of this meeting it was learned that all books and other items on the “provisionally to-be-destroyed” lists had, in fact, been destroyed,

without notifying either committee, in advance of the October 30, 2014, meeting. In fact, as was learned later, the last of the books shipped for destruction were shipped in mid-October. Thus, when the lists we had asked for were finally provided, they were no longer *lists of provisionally to-be-destroyed items*, but rather *lists of destroyed items*. Faculty parties to this matter regard this as a huge distinction, one that contravenes any claim by the library administration that they did, eventually, provide the promised lists.

The rest of this report will address the Library Committee's other activities for Academic Year 2014-15, and, at the end, how faculty might be better served going forward.

- We had an update on the Libraries's plans for a Centennial Celebration in 2015.

- We appointed one of our members to attend the meetings of the Libraries's Acquisitions Committee.

- We wrote a letter to Provost Garnett Stokes arguing for one-time funds for the Libraries to help speed the process of getting the mold-remediated items back onto the shelves and returned to circulation. Without these additional funds, it may still be two years or more before all the affected items that were remediated are again available for circulation. The committee regarded this delay in "making our collection whole" to be unacceptably long, and believes that such delays have adversely affected research and teaching on campus and that this will continue until the job is finished.

- We arranged a tour of the Libraries's Depository facilities for members of the Library Committee and Faculty Council's Ad Hoc Committee on the Library Mold Issue. This took place on May 18, 2015, and was conducted by Brian Cain. Members of the committees got to see the UMLD1 facility on Lemone Boulevard as well as the new secondary depository facility in the old Rustin-Martin Furniture building (off I-70 a few miles west of Columbia). At the second stop we got to see first-hand the scope of the remediation effort, and get a sense of the task still in front of the employees whose job it is to get the books back into circulation.

In the longer term it would of course be best to have a second depository facility that more-or-less mirrors the one on Lemone Blvd. We understand that that facility was planned for and built with the possibility of that kind of expansion in the plans. The land is there (adjacent to the current building on Lemone Blvd.), and the capacity of the air-handlers, humidity control equipment, etc., were chosen to accommodate this.

Finally, it seems necessary to comment on the role of the Library Committee, and how this is perceived by the library administration. It seems that there is entirely too much of an effort by the library administration to protect "its turf" and to view faculty as antagonistic to the libraries, which is certainly not the case. One has library administration keeping information from faculty, and keeping decisions to themselves that should be at least informed by faculty

input and discussions, entirely too often. Going forward, it would be best if the MU Libraries operated on an open and transparent basis, one where faculty and students were informed of important events (e.g., the mold problem) and issues (budget cuts, destruction of books, etc.) in a timely and open manner. The MU Libraries exist to serve the state of Missouri, particularly its research and teaching missions for its students and faculty. The library administration should be open to faculty and student input and should be actively engaged in meeting the needs and demands of faculty and students. Indeed, a case can be made that faculty and students should shape the policies and procedures of the MU Libraries, and that the Libraries's administration and staff should be engaged with faculty and students at all times to do their bidding. We should never again be faced with flip comments by administrators, or with having to worm out and reconstruct the actual events of a disaster well after the fact, where the library administration has kept all the important decisions to itself.