

New Mexico State University External Library Review Team

Report

June 1, 2011

Introduction

Upon invitation and appointment by Executive Vice President and Provost Wendy Wilkins, the Library External Review Team visited New Mexico State University Libraries (hereafter Libraries) on April 18-20, 2011 to conduct a site visit as the central component of its external review. In preparation for the site visit, the Libraries prepared a report on their strategic initiatives and identified 5 areas the NMSU Libraries requested the team to address. The Libraries provided the team with an electronic resource room of documents to supplement the report. The team appreciates the considerable work the Libraries did to prepare for the team's visit as well as the unfettered access to major library stakeholders.

The site visit included a wide range of meetings, including meetings with the dean of the libraries, the dean's administrative team, individual library departments, the library faculty, approximately 32 campus faculty representing broad campus disciplines, approximately 35 students, central IT leadership, and the directors of the branch campus libraries. The team also met with the President, Provost, and Associate Provost. All individuals expressed strong beliefs in the essential campus role of the library. They also provided the team with important insights into the Libraries' strengths and challenges related to its programs, collections, staffing, infrastructure, and collaboration. The team deeply appreciates the support, respect, candor and gracious hospitality it received throughout the review process.

The following report includes nine programmatic sections that address the five issues of study identified by the Libraries as well as external perspectives that the review team brought to the review. It should be noted that this review is not comprehensive but rather it seeks to identify key and focused opportunities for investment in the Libraries by all partners to ensure a strategic future in meeting campus needs.

Libraries Faculty and Staff

A major strength of the NMSU Libraries is its faculty and staff. In the team's interviews with the library departments, the team found the library faculty and staff to be very positive about the university, while acknowledging the challenges of declining resources and flat salaries. They also expressed a "can do" attitude for getting projects done despite declining resources. They are proud of the work they do and the positive relationship they have built with the academic departments. Moreover, in our meeting with the campus faculty, the faculty members were uniformly complimentary of their interactions with the library faculty and staff. Students also noted that they appreciated the service they received. Students who work in the libraries were very complimentary of their supervisors and noted how working at the libraries had helped them in their studies.

In reviewing the Libraries' initiatives achieved and underway, the team was impressed with its accomplishments; however it will be essential to match the staffing infrastructure with expectations. New positions, whether funded internally by the Libraries or through campus investments, must be clearly focused to match campus mandates for the future.

Organizational Style

The NMSU Libraries uses a hierarchical organizational approach. This style emphasizes efficiency in operations. The team also found strong department structures and leadership in which departmental library faculty and staff work well together and are supportive of departmental work. It appears that communication occurs primarily within departments and through department heads to and from the administration. Input is sought and decision making rests at the top of the organization. This highly centralized administrative structure has made administrative processes not as transparent as they might be. The team found that departmental leaders, front line faculty and staff were unclear about some decision-making processes, and about budget issues.

Moreover, more transparency in the libraries about how the budget is structured and how funds are distributed would be helpful to the libraries so that faculty and staff have a better understanding of the complete financial picture for the libraries. This way they can help explain library budget processes to campus faculty who have a vested concern in how the libraries budget impacts their research and instructional work.

In conclusion, while a traditional hierarchical approach can be effective in a stable environment, organizational researchers are finding that in rapidly changing environments such as higher education, different structures may be needed. Organizations find that structures that promote cross department interaction, sharing of detailed information throughout the organization, shared power, and less control at the top of the hierarchy can provide a more flexible organization that can respond more easily to changes in the environment. Partnerships between departments can be developed so that projects are cross department efforts rather than single department assignments. As the University identifies strategies for addressing declining state resources and changes in higher education, an exploration of different organizational styles may be helpful.

Optimizing Staff Resources

NMSU Libraries have presented a variety of workshops for staff on various library resources. Job training is handled within the departments. The Library faculty and staff could benefit from a more formal staff development program with a coherent curriculum or set of workshops that will help staff continue to improve skills. Workshops on coping with change, on university budgeting strategies, on mobile technologies, for example, could be included. Campus partners might be able to help present workshops to keep costs of the program at a minimum. It may be possible to develop an internal certificate program to acknowledge individual staff members who complete a series of workshops. There are a number of models of staff development programs that NMSU might want to explore including the program at the University of Maryland Libraries.

The team met with the directors for the four NMSU community college campus libraries. These library directors are very interested in new and/or enriched collaborations that might increase efficiencies in staffing, services and programs, and ways that they might increase access to collections for all students. They are particularly interested in joint electronic journal licenses that might be applicable to the system. They expressed interest in cooperating on technical processing efforts, and on public service and online reference efforts. They explained ways they could contribute to the LibGuides, provide specialized reference services, and share locally unique collections.

Understanding User Needs

The NMSU Libraries have done a number of targeted studies of user needs. Now would be an appropriate time to consider initiating a campus-wide survey using the web-based LibQual instrument. As quoted from the LibQual website, “the survey measures user perceptions of service quality in three dimensions: Affect of Service, Information Control, and Library as Place. For each item, users indicate their minimum service level, desired service level, and perceived service performance. The survey contains additional items that address information literacy outcomes, library use, and general satisfaction.” It should be noted that the survey instrument has improved over time with a shorter questionnaire. The results can help identify services that may not be priorities to campus students and faculty. There is a large body of information available now on how libraries have used the survey results, how to best administer the survey to achieve a good response rate, and how to compare results among libraries. The results of the LibQual survey can be used to target and explore areas for enhancement or decreased emphasis, change, potential investment, and further assessment. Furthermore, the results can be used for national or regional comparison purposes and benchmarking.

Service Issues

The Libraries are providing a wide range of services and an extensive library instruction program. The instruction program includes credit courses, course based instruction, workshops, and campus orientation programs. This breadth of instructional activities may be difficult to maintain as resources become more restricted. The Libraries and the campus might benefit from developing a more focused approach, which could include more online tutorials and decrease the face-to face efforts that are more resource intensive. Online tutorials would also be a way to provide instruction in the summer when library faculty are not available.

Because the library faculty, for the most part, are not available in the summer due to nine-month contracts, library departments face difficult reductions of key professional staffing which supports a broad range of public and staff needs. In order to mitigate these staffing absences, the Libraries are in a position to create an innovative training and service program to provide all staff and students who are providing front line services with the help they need to be effective. In the short time on campus the team did not extensively explore the training programs in place, but have the impression that training is done within departments. If that is correct, a program of library-wide training and tutorials could be helpful. The Libraries may also want to explore the online programs such as LibAnswers from LibGuides, which provides a way to record reference questions and answers and develop an online reference database focused on the needs of the individual institution. Further such a program would be helpful in the

academic year as reference librarians do not staff the Branson library, and students are referred to the Zuhl library for reference assistance. Since students may not follow such referrals, a system that provided more online reference assistance at Branson with limited staffing resources would be helpful.

One area that should be examined in light of declining resources is the appropriate level of service provided to the public. The Libraries provide a wide range of services to the local community that may duplicate services and programs available from the public library or given the usage may no longer be viable. Furthermore, increased collaboration with external library partners or service partners should be actively explored. Now may be the appropriate time to consider charging for guest borrowers cards and other services provided to the general public.

Collection Management Issues

Electronic Resource Collections

With the updating of the Libraries strategic plan, the Libraries are in a position to reassess the role of legacy print collections for NMSU. Instead of building print collections that are experiencing declining circulation, NMSU Libraries are in a position to assess and reinvent the traditional approach to collections in academic libraries. The Libraries are in a position to emphasize electronic resources and services as the top priority rather than print collection building as noted in the current strategic plan. The general strategy would assist with critical space and floor load issues. National efforts to create a minimum number of national print repositories could provide NMSU with access to legacy print materials and provide more flexibility in building digital rather than print collection.

Journal Collection: Campus acceptance of electronic resources over print resources appears to be growing as evident from the campus faculty who met with the team. In particular they were strongly interested in electronic journals over their print versions. Decreasing emphasis on print legacy collections would therefore be an essential strategic initiative, including current subscriptions and purchase of electronic journal back files. This strategy would allow the duplicated print volumes to be withdrawn. This strategy represents a clear national trend that recognizes the strong preference for the efficiencies of the electronic format and the high costs of limited space.

Government Documents: Extending electronic preference to government documents would increase their usage. In terms of the current print government documents collection, legacy print documents that are not central to the NMSU curriculum and research efforts, and regional and state history could be withdrawn rather than stored. Much of these collections are and will be available electronically.

Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery

No library is in a position to provide its faculty and students the full range of resources they need given current fiscal restraints. Reliable and efficient document delivery and interlibrary loan services are essential. A change in approach toward collections would benefit from a change in the interlibrary loan operation to decrease the time needed to obtain materials from other libraries. For example, joining the Rapid system (Rapidill.org) would allow NMSU Libraries to receive journal articles in less than 24

hours. While Rapid is an ongoing cost, it is an affordable choice for improving the speed with which NMSU can fill journal requests and would represent a high-value investment.

Consortial Electronic Licensing Agreements

Another key collection management issue is to continue to review and seek the best opportunities for joint licensing of electronic resources. The team strongly supports the Libraries' recent decision to join Lyrasis with its continued membership with Amigos. Further the Libraries can take advantage of licenses available through the Greater Western Library Alliance through the University of New Mexico Libraries membership. The Libraries are aware of these options and can do comparisons among these consortia as licenses become open to negotiation.

Faculty also expressed interest in having a way to refresh journal collections, dropping titles that may not be as central to the curriculum and research interests of the faculty even though the Libraries have subscribed to the title for many years, and adding new titles to reflect strategic research interests. Such a system could be net cost-neutral if, that is, to add a new title, faculty would identify a title of near equal value in the same discipline to cancel.

Collection Space

As noted in the Libraries report, the campus needs to address the structural issues in the library buildings. The floors are not able to hold the weight of the current collections. The Libraries have shifted collections, done some weeding of collections, and created a temporary storage space to address the immediate concern. Further weeding of the collections can help provide temporary relief. The campus has at least two options for addressing the space issue.

One option is to build off-site storage for lesser-used collections. This solution assumes that the print collections will continue to grow and that NMSU will continue to be a storage site for legacy print collections.

An alternative option would be to lease temporary warehouse space for lesser-used collections to resolve immediate floor issues. Leasing space would provide time for the campus to determine the appropriate collection size and growth patterns, and balance of electronic and print materials. The campus faculty and library faculty would have time (perhaps up to 5 years) to develop and implement a collection plan that meets the needs of the campus without replicating a traditional model of storing print books that rarely or never circulate. Such a collection plan should also address the need for space for archival and special collections as the campus builds unique manuscript and archival collections and papers to support campus priorities. By allowing time for campus consultation, and discussing strategies with libraries that have successfully implemented collection de-accession options, the campus could avoid the problems some institutions have discovered when storage options for collections are implemented without adequate time for discussion.

Public Spaces

Public space is a major asset for any library and given the rapid growth of learning communities and group learning/research projects the role of public space is changing dramatically. An increase of 30-50% in library visits over the past four to five years is not unusual for university libraries. University

students are looking to their libraries to provide well-designed comfortable public spaces with robust wireless access which support collaborative work spaces with access to multi-media tools, café and casual dining opportunities, group learning experiences, and innovative teaching spaces, quiet individual study spaces, enriched computer work stations with easy access to public printing, adequate public study spaces, 24/7 access to physical library space, library research collections arranged in intuitive arrangements, etc. In short, public spaces are being transformed to provide collaborative and noisy student learning spaces that underscore community, fun and learning as well as serious individual research spaces. Libraries are also benefiting from shared revenues from coffee/dining options available in the libraries. The “café” model has proven to be successful with students and serves as another revenue source for the libraries.

NMSU students specifically mentioned their interests in a strong mix of these evolving services and spaces – in particular a coffee/dining facility and collaborative group learning spaces that would enhance the community-building role of the library. They also expressed concerns over lost public space due to the growth of the physical collection and want easily accessible computer workstations. Student support of the library was striking, and the team encourages the Libraries and the campus to consider creating innovative new facilities within the library public spaces that emphasize opportunities for meeting contemporary needs and opportunities for revenue diversification. A new publication by Joan Lippincott and Stacey Greenwell, “7 Things You Should Know About the Modern Learning Commons,” (Educause Learning Initiative, 2011) summarizes the concepts that have evolved over the last decades as libraries have redesigned public spaces to meet contemporary needs. This is an excellent source for thinking forward about space.

Technology

The future of the Libraries is going to be heavily dependent upon information technology. The dean and the staff concur that additional IT (systems) staff will be necessary to stay competitive and to provide the kind of innovative services that users expect. The dean added a position to support web applications last year, and she has submitted a request for a digital projects manager in the coming year. In regards to digital projects, the IT Department has a pivotal role regarding ensuring an appropriate infrastructure to ensure ultimate success in this arena.

The library IT staff see their responsibility as providing infrastructure and feel that they are providing adequate infrastructure support for the systems and projects approved by the dean; but library faculty and staff feel a strong need for additional applications support and are unclear about the exact responsibilities and role of the Libraries’ IT Department. The team found that the library faculty and staff have interests in more iterative processes and communication regarding IT projects that would include increased staff input regarding priorities, developmental input, problem resolution tracking systems, and timeframes for activities.

NMSU ICT provides network access for the entire campus, including the Libraries. ICT also partners with the Libraries Access Services in the loan of laptops. ICT administrators are eager to partner with the Libraries in new ways, including such things as electronic signage, printing solutions for students, campus-wide individual “home page,” and an Information Commons, which is an increasingly common

student service in academic libraries nationally. The Libraries in collaboration with ICT could apply for technology student fees for these types of projects and services.

Another national trend is for academic units to rely on central computing for infrastructure (e.g. cloud computing, server farms, enterprise email and calendaring software) and to focus unit resources on specialized unit applications (e.g. for the Libraries: Voyager, web applications, Information Commons, etc.). ITC and the Libraries might wish to review these trends together and rebalance responsibilities across the two units.

Vision for the Future

New Mexico State University and its Libraries are well positioned to consider a revised vision for the future of the campus academic library. Rather than retain the traditional approaches that emphasize ownership of collections, the NMSU libraries should consider how to transform their library and services to a digital-based services and collection approach. Such a vision might combine library-provided services and electronic collections with more robust consortia and cooperative arrangements both on the campus, within the system, within the state and within the region, to provide tailored services to faculty and students. Library as place remains an important element in the vision with investments in student spaces, group study areas, multimedia areas, and food options, while limiting the retention of unused duplicative print collections.

The Libraries are also well positioned with wonderful special collections to continue to build digital collections to highlight the unique materials available at NMSU, to attract scholars and students, and to share unique resources with their international program efforts. The Libraries, working with the campus faculty, departments and ICT, are also positioned to develop an institutional repository to highlight faculty research and to increase sharing of faculty research with the state.

Key investments in the Libraries as noted in this report could include renovation of public spaces for student use, focused library faculty or staff hires to assist in ensuring this future, selected additions of electronic resources and journal back files to allow the removal of some legacy print collections, a short term leasing option to resolve more immediate space issues while developing a plan for collection growth. Moving more rapidly into the electronic age and not concentrating on print efforts could position the NMSU libraries to meet the changing needs of students and faculty in these times of reduced resources and continuous change.

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