THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Vancouver Library Committee
c/o
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To: Vancouver Senate

From: Library Committee

Re: Report of the Senate Library Committee

Report of the Senate Library Committee

In its first full year of activity since it was revived in 2009-10, and in fulfilling its mandate [1] to "advise and assist" the University Librarian, the Committee held consultative meetings with several individuals and groups, including the Library's newly appointed Director, Digital Initiatives (Alan Bell), its Rare Books and Special Collections Archivist (Sarah Romkey), its Scholarly Communications Coordinator, Digital Initiatives (Joy Kirchner), and one of the co-chairs of the working group on Open Access for the Provost's Scholarly Communications Steering Committee (Dr. Wyeth Wasserman, who presented a draft Position Statement on Dissemination of Research: see also below). A further meeting, with the chairs of the Library Advisory Committees for the faculties (which were earlier canvassed for their concerns), has been arranged for a date after the last meeting of Senate.

Recognizing that senators have been informed of the Library's main agenda and current policy directions by the University Librarian (when presenting her Annual Report to Senate), having at present nothing [2] "to recommend to the Senate with respect to rules on the management and conduct of the Library," noting that the chief of the "matters of policy under discussion by the Committee" [3] this year—namely, the Library's role in supporting and implementing a future policy on Dissemination of Research (Open Access)—awaits recommendations by the Open Access working group of the Scholarly Communications Steering Committee reporting to the Provost, the Library Committee confines itself in this report to three sets of observations of a general order which, it trusts, may be of use both to the Senate as it considers academic issues bearing on the Library and to the next Senate Library Committee as it reflects upon its mandate [see 1-3 above]. These observations, framed by the questions posed below, correspond to three areas of particular concern identified by the University Librarian at the Committee's January 2011 meeting, which were: "awareness of the role of the Library on campus," "the Library budget," and "space requirements."

1. What *is* the University Library?

The designation and mandate of a Senate "Library" Committee presuppose a common understanding of the nature and functions of a University Library, but such a shared understanding is now difficult to pin down. Whereas a decade ago it seemed possible that the idea of a University Library would be superseded and replaced—e.g., by that of a "Learning Centre"—what has happened instead, at UBC as elsewhere, is that the conception of a University Library has evolved, mainly by expansion in several directions at once, to encompass new realities. Thus the idea of the "Library" at UBC now comprehends, *inter alia*: study and social space on campus for students and others who may or may not be accessing information resources provided by the Library ("Learning Commons"); online information resources for UBC personnel who may or may not be on campus; a wide range of digitization projects, extending rapidly beyond materials already or previously held in other forms by the UBC Library; UBC's future stake in a BC Integrated Research Library (IRL) that would contain the "last" retained copy of journal-issues and other volumes otherwise deaccessioned by the stakeholder libraries; an institutional repository (cIRcle) for the research production of UBC students and faculty, whether or not published elsewhere, envisaged as one element of a larger initiative for Open Access; technical, instructional, reference and research support and infrastructure provided by library personnel to students and faculty, whether at Library facilities (e.g., "Research Commons") or elsewhere across campus or at the hospital sites; electronic systems for management of collections and user accounts, accessible through mobile devices; a wide range of non-bibliographic services provided to non-University communities, locally and province-wide (e.g., via the IKBLC) … While most of the functions named here still have a visible relation to the "traditional" functions of the University Library of thirty years ago, all represent significant departures and expansions—driven or made possible by new technology and new visions of the social role of the university—with respect to the former mandate of university libraries. One inevitable result of this internal diversification and external diffusion of "library" functions is a fracturing of perceptions of what the University Library is and of what its limits are or ought to be. From this follow two further "academic" questions:

2. What should the "budget" for the Library be?

The Library Committee's mandate to advise and assist the Librarian includes "advising on the allocation of *collection* funds to the fields of instruction and research," but since the idea of a Library as comprising essentially its own "collection(s)" is now outdated, in practice the budgetary concerns of the Committee tend quickly to exceed that brief. Although the Library has a (small) special fund for new initiatives, its operating budget has not seen any major increase in recent years, despite the multiplication and expansion of Library functions, and even though few of the anticipated "savings" consequent on the declining (relative) importance of print media have yet been banked; physical collections in the traditional sense still need to be acquired, catalogued, managed, shelved and preserved. As "The Library" comes to stand for something like "cross-faculty, cross-sector local manager of universal data resources," so the question of how funding for its proliferating functions is assured at the appropriate level becomes more pressing. While this issue is in a strict sense *ultra vires* for the Library Committee, it has loomed large in our discussions this year.

3. What are the “space requirements” of the Library?

As books gradually disappear into vaults or remote storage, so book-stacks give way to alternative uses of the space occupied by library buildings. If the “real” library had simply morphed into a “virtual” library accessible without any mediation beyond that provided by Microsoft and Google, all that space could be vacated for “non-library” uses. Since that has not happened—since, on the contrary, the Library has assumed an array of new or expanded functions requiring continued heavy investments in staff, equipment, infrastructure and in facilities where students, staff, faculty and members of the public can interact both “live” and online—questions about the provision and allocation of space for library services, and about the increasingly porous and potentially contested boundaries between library-space, non-library common space, and non-library kinds of dedicated space are also coming to the fore. This, in turn, is just one aspect of the challenge now facing the Library Committee in its duty of advising and assisting the Librarian in “developing a general program of library service *for all the interests of the University*.”

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Mark Vessey, Chair
Senate Library Committee