

VCU Libraries Advisory Committee, April 20, 2018
3rd Floor Conference Room/Boardroom
James Branch Cabell Library
2:00–3:00 p.m.

Minutes

Attendees

Meredith Baines (chair), Matt Bogenschurz, Corey Davis, Hassen Hafiz, Les Harrison, Cheng Ly, Tom Nelson, Faye Prichard, Nancy Stutts, Kenneth Warren

Absent with notice

Lelia Brinegar, Amy Pakyz, Valerie Robnolt, Jayaraman Vijayakumar

Absent without notice

Lorraine Anderson, Nicole Ekanem, Sarah Mizer

Staff: Kathy Bradshaw, Karen Cary, Jimmy Ghaphery, Teresa Knott, John Ulmschneider, Pam Fraga (recording secretary)

Business

Review and approval of agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Review and approval of minutes from January 2018

The minutes were approved as presented.

Consideration of proposed HEETF and STF investments, 2018-19 (handout)

Mr. Ghaphery reported that the proposed expenditures described in the handout largely resembled Higher Education Equipment Trust Fund (HEETF) and Student Technology Fees (STF) investments for last year. They include virtual reality technology for TML, a modest increase in student-available computers, and sign-out equipment. Computers on the list mostly replace existing ones purchased through previous HEETF and STF investments that have arrived at the end of their lifespan. Mr. Ulmschneider noted that the VCU Libraries had reviewed the investment plans with both of the student committees that work with the library system, the Cabell Library Undergraduate Committee (CLUAC) and the Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC), and both had endorsed them. Mr. Ulmschneider asked the Committee for a motion to endorse the proposed expenditures. This motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously.

In brief discussion, it was explained that equipment purchased for TML will transferred to the space TML will occupy following the relocation. Mr. Ulmschneider also noted that all purchases from STF are only for student-use equipment in public spaces; STF does not support staff or research equipment.

Reports and Discussion

Proposed hours for JBC and TML, 2018-19

Ms. Knott reported no proposed changes to the existing schedule of openings and closings for both locations for academic year 2018-19. A handout with the hours will be sent to the Committee immediately following the meeting. There was some brief discussion, focused on two areas:

- Cabell will be open during intercession.

- Materials will not be marked overdue if their due date falls within a holiday closure and the materials were borrowed from the VCU Libraries. However, if an item is borrowed from another library through interlibrary loan, it will be due per the requirements of the lending school, over which VCU Libraries has no control.
- Some sort of book return window/box/container will be installed at Cabell Library at some point in the near future to make returning books more convenient.

Status of off-site storage and new health sciences library

Ms. Knott reported that both she and Mr. Ulmschneider met with University representatives on April 19 to discuss further developments regarding the relocation of TML. Mr. Ulmschneider explained that there has been little communication about this project to date because it has not been approved by the Board of Visitors. However, the Board has since approved the concept and so better communication will be forthcoming, providing improved information about these important changes. Several points were made:

- The new location for TML will be the Marshall Street Pavilion, adjacent to the new Children's Hospital.
- The VCU Libraries plan to relocate 10,000 volumes from the TML general collection and 10,000 from TML Special Collections into the new space. The remainder of the collections will be relocated to storage and retrieved on demand.
- The 1st floor will be classrooms and study space, as well as innovative media space and lecture spaces.
- Basement will house studios for project development.
- Staff offices will be on all 3 floors.
- Research and Education as well as Admin Offices will be on the 2nd floor.
- Special Collections will be on the 3rd floor.

The University has identified June 2019 as the tentative date to vacate the current TML location and October 2019 as the tentative demolition date.

What's the future of expensive journals and journal packages? A briefing and discussion. (PowerPoint)

The slide deck presented by Mr. Ulmschneider opened with several key questions:

- How do we assess the value of particular journal subscriptions?
- What is the impact of open access so far?
- What obstacles do we face?
- What benefits do we seek?

Mr. Ulmschneider explained that VCU and many other institutions have long explored how they might implement significant changes in the ways academic communities purchase and use journal subscriptions. Current subscriptions represent a large portion of the VCU Libraries' budget and present the university with significant, contractually-obligated cost increases in the budget each year. The high costs prevent the VCU Libraries doing more to advance student and faculty success, and require funding from the university that might be used for other important needs. He presented data collected from several doctoral institutions showing that STEM disciplines require the bulk of funding, which is used to acquire subscriptions essential to the conduct of science and research, but other disciplines share the costs too.

The new university budget model demands a higher level of accountability regarding how the VCU Libraries promotes the success of all disciplines, so it is important to work closely with all faculty and staff to find a path forward to reducing the costs of subscriptions. Mr. Ulmschneider also noted that decades ago the practice of developing "big deals" – comprehensive subscription package with large scientific publishers like Elsevier – provided what appeared to be a good deal for universities and was

widely adopted. However, as “big deals” have evolved, both their costs and their benefits increasingly have come into question.

The primary measure of journal value that has evolved over time is “download count” – a single number that describes how many times a journal article has been downloaded or viewed by someone at a subscribing institution. However, evidence has shown that download counts are an inadequate surrogate for actual use: a download of an article does not necessarily mean the article was read or was useful. In addition, the growth of open access publishing has made freely available many journal articles with publication dates at least a year or more before the current date, which has important consequences:

- The cost of a subscription increasingly is for the current year’s articles only, since articles from the preceding year are often freely accessible. That can make the per-article cost for downloaded articles stunningly high.
- A growing proportion of research material is published initially as open access, available immediately to anyone at no cost through open-access and pre-print depositories at universities and elsewhere.

Mr. Ulmschneider reported that in recent years several new ways to measure the usefulness of journals have evolved that augment download counts with data on what articles are already in open access, how much a subscribing institution’s faculty publish in the journal, the participation of subscribing institution faculty on the editorial board for a journal, how much of a journal’s content is already available in permanently available backfiles, and the like. He pointed out there is a poverty of analysis and information about journals: Faculty don’t know what the actual costs to the libraries is and libraries don’t know what the actual use needs of the faculty are. These new approaches to measuring journal usefulness and cost hold promise in addressing this challenge.

Mr. Ulmschneider asked for feedback from committee members. Among a number of comments were:

- Faculty hadn’t thought of the issue of journal subscriptions from this perspective before.
- Suggested that the presentation be more visual and less wordy.
- Would be useful to include which universities were involved and what they had done.
- Some universities have indeed cancelled bundled subscriptions; some have come back to it and some have not.
- The more institutions combine their efforts in addressing journal costs and Big Deals, the more impact they will have and the more likely to be successful.
- There is NO incentive for the publishers companies to lower prices, and no marketplace in which market forces can work to do so.
- It’s challenging to collect data on what journals faculty use, and how they use them. At VCU, some data was collected in 2002/2003 when many subscriptions were cancelled because of budget reductions, but that data holds little value today.
- Liaison librarians are very helpful in letting faculty know of alternate sources for journal articles that are already available.
- While an interesting idea, it’s not practical to rotate the purchase of journals as most users need the current year’s information, especially in STEM disciplines.
- Faculty and students still can get articles from discontinued subscriptions through ILL, as long as the demand for journal articles from individual journals isn’t too high.
- Libraries must work with faculty on this issue: the libraries must say no and the faculty have to stop publishing in high-cost publications. It’s a difficult challenge for both parties.
- Publishers have been offering more and better services to faculty to entice them to publish with them. Publishers quite reasonably will do everything they can to maintain their revenue streams.

- The academy as a whole must reach the status of “enough” and actually stop purchasing these bundles, but it’s critical that other universities join in this effort -- otherwise there is no leverage at all.
- Definitely do not want to compromise the use of e-texts to which faculty increasingly turn. It is possible to search the VCU Libraries collection online for e-texts.
- The student response to a brief survey was that the journal use was 1 to 2 articles per month.

Mr. Ulmschneider thanked the Committee for its input and said he would keep them apprised as to progress on this very critical issue.

Mr. Ulmschneider reported that the proposed Interfaith Meditation Room has been designed with help from several disciplines, including students in Qatar. The funds have yet to be raised, since this construction will not be supported by public funds. The room will be located on the 3rd floor of Cabell.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm.