San José State University

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library

University Library Program Review

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Barbara Butler
Dean, University Library
Sonoma State University

Amir Dabirian
Vice President for Information Technology / Chief Information Officer
California State University, Fullerton
Purpose of the library program review
The SJSU King Library which opened in 2003 as an innovative partnership between the SJSU Library and the SJ public library has just completed its fifth year of operation. As required by University library policy, evaluation of the library program must be undertaken within five year cycles and will parallel the program planning process in other academic disciplines of the university. The purpose of the assessment, as articulated by the SJSU Academic Senate, is to ensure that the university community continues to receive high quality services and access to collections.

Outline of the review process
A comprehensive self assessment, the University Library Self Study, dated May 2009, was compiled during Fall 2008 through Spring 2009. Under the guidance of and in consultation with the University Library Board, the self study represents the work of a cross-section of library managers, library faculty and staff. An impressive set of appendices with supporting data completes the picture. The report studies the university library program and how it is serving the teaching, learning, information, and research needs of the university community.

The complete self study was provided as background for the external reviewers invited to offer a perspective on the self analysis. Amir Dabirian, Vice President for Information Technology and CIO at CSU Fullerton, and Barbara Butler, University Library Dean at Sonoma State University, comprised the external review team. An on-site visit was made to the King Library on May 4 and 5, 2009. The visit was well-planned with opportunities to talk with many constituencies from within and beyond the library in a variety of meetings and open forum formats. As is typical, an external review serves to validate the institutional self-study, incorporating the perspective of outside reviewers who are conversant with the role and functions of the organization and who apply standard benchmarks to the statement of self-assessment.

Summary of observations
It is evident that the King Library is a dynamic, successful enterprise with an ambitious mission to serve a broad range of constituencies. The collaborative project joining a university and public library operates in a context of unusual organizational complexity. While this review addresses only the University Library side of the equation (a review of the joint library will be undertaken at a later date), the characteristics of the joint facility are integral to the analysis. On the one hand, the partnership enjoys the strengths of both libraries and can be proud to be a national model of collaboration. The King Library has transformed the downtown district where it serves a role as a cultural hub and brings community and campus together in a very visible space. Both the city and the university have been applauded for their vision and commitment to such an innovative approach to library services and programs.

There is no doubt that by its very nature, the joint project presents organizational challenges. Contemporary libraries are very complex organizations in an era of information explosion and rapid technological evolution. Merging two organizations with different administrative structures and mandates into one suggests that there will be some areas that will require extra
attention. Clarity of mission, goals and directions may need to be reviewed more often. Issues around personnel may surface. Decision-making in many instances may take extra time for consultation and compromise. Good and frequent communication, always an important organizational factor, is likely to be more critical.

It is a testament to the professionalism of the leadership and staffs of both libraries that the King Library has flourished and proved to be successful beyond expectations.

**Review of University Library program**

This report is arranged following the outline as presented in the library self study.

**Mission**

The mission of the San Jose State University Library is to serve the university by supporting teaching, learning and research. It is evident that the library exceeds these goals in many ways. Library services and programs for faculty and students are rich and sustained. The library’s personnel, including managers, faculty, and staff express pride and professionalism in the quality of service and commitment to continuous improvement. Constituencies external to the library express positive appreciation for the value that the library brings to the university and to its surrounding community. Commitment to student academic success is clearly a priority.

**SJSU/SJPL joint library concept and collaboration**

The university library acknowledges the impressive benefits that result from the innovative partnership between the university and the city. Enhancement of services, expanded funding, and new opportunities such as grant awards are clear benefits. The value afforded by the joint library’s reach across many constituencies has attracted funding agencies and resulted in grants that might not otherwise be secured. Another area of joint benefit is efficiencies for training and professional development for both staffs. In the important area of collections, the expanded breadth and depth of access to the holdings of both libraries benefits all parties. The public library strength in multi-language materials and in media materials is a boon to all patrons while the research and curriculum materials of the university library now reach a wider audience.

As a physical space, and one of the few large open civic spaces in San Jose, the academic community and the city and general public community have far more exposure to each other than they would otherwise have. This interaction introduces diverse and perhaps unfamiliar life styles and cultures to all library patrons. In this setting, the library truly becomes a learning center and a microcosm of our global environment.

**Planning**

The university library maintains an active planning culture. The library strategic plan renews historical library values and lays a foundation for current strategic directions. These are reflected by the following priorities: a digital library initiative, building a knowledge base, inquiry learning, community partnership, organizational capacity and growth, development and
advancement, and evaluation and assessment. This framework aligns with the university’s vision for academic excellence in a welcoming inclusive environment and service to the local and regional community. These strategic directions serve as a roadmap to guide specific goals and objectives for the library and its personnel. The university library also undertakes joint planning with the public library where appropriate. Areas of common commitment are found in the digital library initiative; collaborations, continuing and new; sustainable customer service models; and innovation and continuous improvement.

An explicit commitment to assessment is articulated by the university library. This effort is being integrated into the instruction program in particular. Renewable, flexible planning coupled with evaluation is vital to a successful program. The University library has worked hard to incorporate constant examination of its performance into its operating culture.

**Review of programs and services**
The university library plans and delivers programs and services with a commitment to serving a large and diverse student population and supporting the teaching and research needs of a multi-faceted faculty. The evidence for this observation is readily found in the self study and its appendices and corroborated by the on-site review visit.

**Technology**
For all contemporary academic libraries, a robust and continually evolving technology base is the backbone for providing efficient access and retrieval of information and content for teaching and learning. Students benefit from computing resources strategically placed and well-managed. The university library offers wired and wireless network access, an array of desktops and an active laptop lending program. A technical support service assists students with access questions. Learning labs and a smart classroom augment the teaching and learning infrastructure. The level of computing activity in the library indicates that this service is essential to today’s students.

An important element of the digital landscape, a library’s web site serves as a gateway for students and faculty to take advantage of online resources and teaching tools. As a marketing tool, the web presence should be up to date, easy to navigate, and visually compelling. Both the self study and several focus groups point out the need for improvement in the current web site and indicate that planning is underway for a rigorous review and renovation of the web pages. One critique expressed concern that with the web site representing both components of the joint library, it may be more difficult for academic patrons to find their way to the resources they need. This challenge will be addressed in the web redesign project.

The online catalog, utilizing the Innovative Interfaces system, is heavily used for access to local library holdings. As with so many other technology systems, the online catalog as we know it will likely be replaced soon by more flexible, open source systems more responsive to current, especially younger, users. As with the web site, the web 2.0 environment will drive the need
for user-centered technology tools. The university library is very cognizant of emerging trends and planning for transition.

The accelerating migration to digital resources, particularly specialized discipline databases, growing viability of e-books, digitization of Special Collections, and the implementation of a digital institutional repository, all illustrate the direction that most libraries, the King Library among them, are pursuing. The university library has acknowledged this shift in its digital initiative strategic direction, an important indicator that the library is keeping current with emerging trends and working to stay ahead of the curve.

Collections
At the heart of faculty concerns are the university collections that ensure support for research and teaching and incidentally serve as a recruitment tool. The university library has been able to expand its collections, not only print but particularly electronic resources, with the assistance of library faculty acting in liaison capacity to the academic departments. Utilizing best practices, the collections are developed to respond to the curriculum and changing student demographics. This library role has always, and everywhere, been the subject of critique by faculty since it is impossible to ever acquire sufficient resources to please every possible subject interest. However, with a commitment to electronic discovery tools and robust resource sharing systems, it is possible to provide faculty and students, in a quick turn-around time, with materials that may not be held on site.

The library has an impressive number of journals, mostly online, as well as specialized databases, expanding access for the SJSU community. In addition, the SJSU library has a collection of government documents on every conceivable topic. Many of these publications are now being issued in electronic form. While it is understandable that better funding for collection development may be desirable, we may be entering the age of just-in-time rather than just-in-case. Supplementing ownership with rapid access to materials in other collections provides a strategic approach to meeting information needs.

The SJSU library also offers a compelling and rich set of Special collections, among them, the Beethoven Center, the Steinbeck Center, the California History Room and the SJSU Archives. Housed together on an upper floor and enhanced by an attractive lobby and exhibit spaces, these collections are very valuable for outreach programs and donor activities. Conveying the legacy of the traditional library loved by many, they are a symbol of intellectual and cultural heritage. As a public relations tool, special collections are invaluable although costly to service and maintain. These collections, too, are joining the migration to digital format which will expand access beyond the physical space.

In an interesting statement, the self-study notes that “SJSU borrowers actually borrow more from the SJPL collection than they do the SJSU collection” indicating the appeal of public library collections. With this combination, the academic community at SJSU enjoys library collections that offer both breadth and depth.
Learning, teaching & research
Under the umbrella of learning and teaching, the SJSU library provides an active Instruction and Information Literacy program supplemented by a strong Reference and Research assistance program.

The library is committed to supporting student academic success through information literacy instruction and development of research and critical thinking skills. Using a variety of methods including course-integrated instruction, professional librarians reach a staggering number of students for what is arguably one of most critical roles of an academic library. The program is thoughtful and continually reviewed using various assessment processes. The addition of online tutorials and resource guides expands the reach for all students but in particular, for distance education programs. The teaching responsibility for libraries on campuses with a large student body is daunting but SJSU library has an active and successful program. As with the Reference service, demand is likely to exceed capacity but applying good practices such as putting emphasis on key courses, for example, first year experience, basic English and writing courses, and GE courses yields maximum impact.

Various models have and are being tested for Reference and Research Assistance to keep this program responsive and relevant in a new, dynamic facility with a remarkable traffic increase. The current model offers a tiered service with shared staffing to meet an array of queries, with a referral system to specialists for complex information needs. Electronic or virtual reference has been added to the mix. The library is also experimenting with digital learning objects, typically short online tutorials, to complement online reference assistance. While the department handles heavy traffic successfully, several comments expressed a need for a dedicated Reference Services Coordinator for oversight, priority setting and evaluation of professional performance.

Outreach program
Under the broad term of “outreach”, connecting to constituencies has taken on more importance as libraries move away from a historically passive role. The definition of what constitutes outreach varies by institution but promoting the library’s programs and services is essential. SJSU library reaches the university community through teaching, liaison work with academic departments, participation in university processes, and collaboration with units such as the Center for Faculty Development and Disability Services. Programs and events attract the local community as well as the campus and may often be joint programs with the public library. A communication program including newsletters, handouts, flyers and all public messages from the library benefit from consistent identification, or branding, to convey the look and feel of the library. These efforts lead to visibility. Development activities to cultivate advocates for the library are an important component of outreach, often leading to donors and private funding. In an era of budget reductions and competition for limited resources, outreach may make the difference in whether or not the value of the library is recognized. It is a tribute to SJSU library that an outreach effort is considered a priority on many levels. This will ensure sustainability.
**Operational support and structure**
To provide successful programs and services, all libraries depend on organizational units that operate “behind the scenes” to ensure access for library patrons. They provide the work and expertise to acquire and handle materials, create and maintain discovery databases, such as the online catalog and variants, and develop the systems to connect patrons to the information.

Access Services, for example, typically subsumes Circulation (lending and borrowing), Interlibrary Services (interlibrary lending), and may include academic functions such as Course Reserves. Technical Services, a traditional term, refers to the work unit that has been responsible for acquisitions of collection materials and cataloging them for discovery and retrieval. Access and Technical Services functions have arguably experienced more change than most other library functions as technology has fundamentally transformed the library environment. In the SJSU library, the migration to electronic resources, periodical databases, e-journals and e-books has changed the workflow for technical services personnel. In recognition of the growing impact of e-resource management, personnel in this unit are looking at standardization where possible. Some aspects of technical services work, for example, music and media cataloging, continue to require labor-intensive, specialized attention. There are no easy solutions to these issues yet there is hope that the CSU system as a consortium can find new approaches to workflow that will leverage the cooperative on every library’s behalf.

The Access Services department is characterized as the “most merged” of the joint library’s functions. Staff from both libraries work side by side to accomplish the wide array of tasks associated with putting materials in the hands of the patrons. Many changes in physical placement and practices, including self-service wherever feasible, were implemented with the merger. When traffic soared with the opening of the joint library, the workload for all sections of this department increased but good customer service and a practical can-do attitude seem to be hallmarks of this group.

**Information Technology**
Information technology at the King Library is shared between both the public and university organizations. The IT Infrastructure, which consists of the network, servers, and the data center, is managed for the most part by the University IT Staff. This management also includes infrastructure operations for all the public branches of the SJ Public Library. Network traffic for the King Library and the public library branches goes through SJSU and the CSU CENIC network. For specific areas, the IT staffs of the SJSU library and the SJ City library, each provide their own helpdesk and support. In certain common areas, there is some overlap where both IT staffs support operations jointly.

There is also overlap between the university and public sides evident in other areas of the infrastructure. This “merged but separate” scenario provides challenges with decision-making. There has been some friction between the two sides in reaching agreement on matters ranging from simple to complex. There is no formal memo of understanding (MOU) between the two parties giving clear parameters for decision making. Whereas each side expresses a wish to be
more autonomous in their day-to-day tasks, the nature of operations in the SJSU King Library makes autonomy not only impractical but impossible.

The processes of IT operations and IT infrastructure need to be given close attention in the next year to develop a common understanding and a structure that will facilitate cohesive and streamlined decision-making process. The decision-making structure would be enhanced by using a baseline of unified goals and objectives. Each issue for agreement and/or negotiation should be weighed and measured against metrics of stated goals and objectives to assess appropriateness and effectiveness. An improved decision-making and management structure would clarify the process, reduce delays in action, help identify appropriate solutions, and create an environment of amicable consensus.

**Personnel**

The university library has a large personnel base in sheer number of employees but with the magnitude of the joint library program, it is likely still challenging to meet demands. To that end, the library has pursued flexibility in assignments and utilized attrition to re-craft some positions. Currently, two Assistant Deans provide focus at a managerial level on the broad functions of Public Services, Resource Management, & Operations, and Digital Projects, Information Technology, & Technical Services. With the creation of Coordinators for assigned areas of instruction, collection development and scholarly communication, this structure strives to provide leadership for essential academic services. A facility this large with so many complex services to run requires a hierarchical structure to set, communicate and accomplish operational goals.

The role of library faculty, who number approximately 30 full-time and part-time, is a pivotal factor in the success of the library’s academic mission. As faculty, they are charged to design and deliver instruction, collaborate with discipline departments and discipline faculty, and engage in university service such as serving on committees and participating in campus initiatives. Tenure-track librarians are also expected to have a scholarly and/or research agenda. As mirrored elsewhere, recent hires tend to bring more facility with emerging technologies and changing student behaviors to the great benefit of the library’s future. This generational shift will be very important in how well the library handles issues around a digital environment, including ways to reach a younger student population.

A sometimes challenging organizational issue is the balance between full-time and part-time, tenured and tenure-track faculty, both in expectations, scope of responsibility, time management and status, when working together on the same general assignments. A sense of disconnection between faculty and management priorities is a common characteristic of library organizations. At present, the SJSU library uses a team structure that combines related disciplines into broad subject teams to ensure redundancy. This model is intended to provide back-up and shared solutions and yet appears to have raised concerns regarding the creation of unnecessary layers, a loss in communication up and down the organization, and unclear authority lines. These concerns were expressed by more than several people suggesting that
this configuration may benefit from close analysis. It is our understanding that the team structure is currently being evaluated, with consultation, to ascertain its effectiveness and identify possible changes.

An additional factor in dealing with personnel is the sheer size of the joint library - over 400,000 square feet - an enormous facility for which to provide stewardship. The additional safety and security concerns that accrue to such a large public building with heavy traffic must be factored into operating costs. Altogether, a very large number of employees must be brought together across organizational lines to understand and pursue common goals.

Professional development & training
In an environment such as the joint King Library, for which there were no models of comparable complexity, professional development and training programs for staff at all levels has been of utmost importance. With no ability to substantially augment staffing lines, it has been imperative to train in-house employees in as many ways as possible. It is widely acknowledged that library and technology environments have experienced incredible change over the past decade and the pace is accelerating. Job descriptions can change frequently as the functions change. In a public agency with collective bargaining parameters, it is especially challenging to ensure motivation and currency at all levels.

Even before opening and in the five years since, it appears that every opportunity has been taken to address staff development needs. A complete menu of training and mentoring using many different experts, in-house and outsourced, has been designed, implemented, and redesigned. The library has done an excellent job of recognizing the importance of investing in staff, made more critical in lean budget times. Intentional planning around identification of explicit needs for training as well as organizational issues such as communication are continually reviewed. This is an ongoing challenge to which the library is paying close attention.

Resources
As is the case with most CSU libraries, the SJSU university library is funded through a variable combination of sources; largely, general fund, student instructional related activities (IRA) fee, revenue from continuing education, private fundraising and grant support. And, as is the case with most CSU libraries and those beyond our public state system, funding support is not keeping pace with escalating costs. General inflation affecting procurement including library materials, the cost of maintaining technology, and rising salaries all contribute to a growing gap between income and outgo. The SJSU library has benefited more than many CSU libraries by receiving occasional augmentations to the budget base although that trend is now reversed. It is widely assumed that in the current state economy and for some time to come, funding shortfalls will need to be made up by private dollars, fee increases, where feasible, and implementation of internal efficiencies.

Private fundraising is an area for potential funding support although cultivation of donors requires a sustained effort and often leads to donations with strings attached. Likewise, grant awards can supplement funding especially if an award makes possible a desirable priority.
Library collections may be especially attractive to private donors and can result in subject endowments. The SJSU library has had success with this focus reaching an endowment level of a half million dollars. The challenge in seeking private funds is that they rarely benefit general operations. These conditions are well understood by contemporary academic libraries. It is likely that judicious strategic planning and capitalizing on partnerships wherever possible will continue to be the operational drivers in parallel with development work. The SJSU library is not alone in facing an anticipated budget decline but is well positioned with its outreach program to explore alternative solutions.

Self study recommendations
As a concluding section in the self-study, specific recommendations for consideration are listed ranging from broad initiatives to more specific priorities. The recommendations address continued or heightened efforts in assessment, in outreach and fundraising, in information literacy instruction, in collection development, and in digital initiatives. Developing a responsive university library information technology plan and redesigning the library website are also included. Organizational issues for attention suggest further professional development and training, mentoring programs, and evaluation of the faculty team structure. This set of recommendations is consonant with the areas that the library has articulated in its strategic planning. They indicate that the library is very attuned to the current and near-term environment and expecting to progress in its planning initiatives.

Program review summary
It is the opinion of the external review team that the SJSU Library is successfully meeting its mission of high quality services and access to collections for the university community. Further, the university library is achieving its mission based on high professional standards, sensitivity to a complex organizational structure and a well-informed eye to environmental trends that should serve well in the future. In addition, the SJSU library has developed a partnership with the city library that has brought visibility and acclaim to the campus community for its foresight and innovation.

External review recommendations

- Evaluate current communication processes in the organization to ascertain whether information and interpretation is flowing successfully between all organization units and what adjustments, if any, might offer improvement.

- Analyze the team structure currently in use by seeking extensive feedback across all perspectives to identify the concerns about excessive redundancy, weak communication and unclear authority.

- If indicators continue to point to declining funding at a macro level, consider initiating an internal “futures think tank” for determining strategic directions by using scenario planning or other appropriate methods for identifying service and program priorities.
To anticipate changing conditions and/or leadership turnover, ensure that joint library operating agreements are in place, in particular, related to IT management. Consider developing renewable MOUs (memoranda of understanding) and SLAs (service level agreements) with desired objectives and assignment of responsibilities clearly spelled out, and with a mechanism for review and revision that is responsive to dynamic conditions.

Establish a new task force consisting of one or two senior executives from the CSU and one or two senior executives from the City level to conduct a review of Information Technology operations and infrastructure for the King Library. The charge of the new task force will be to evaluate networks, human resources and service delivery with a view to cost efficiencies and to recommend operational processes to streamline the IT operations for both sides.

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