It is our obligation both to follow where our faculties and students take us, and to lead through realization of the new possibilities.

(James G. Neal, Columbia University – Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian)

Introduction – Georgia State University Library today

During the past decade, libraries have sought to balance traditional responsibilities with a variety of new roles. While continuing to maintain paper- and place-based collections and services, libraries must now also function in a much broader virtual environment. Additionally, research libraries are no longer valued solely by the size of the collection or by the number of people coming through the library door. Instead, libraries must also position themselves as partners in the teaching, learning and research endeavors of the academy.

In January 2010, in preparation for participation in the University Strategic Planning process, all Georgia State University (GSU) Library employees were asked to comment on what the GSU Library is doing well and should continue to do, as well as what we should be doing new. Employee responses noted our:

- Compelling user environment.
- Responsiveness to user needs and high quality service.
- Virtual services, including answering reference questions via email and instant messaging. This also includes desktop delivery service for faculty members.
- High level of discipline-specific information support. This includes classes, workshops and one-on-one consultations provided by subject librarians for faculty and students.
- Undergraduate Research Awards presented annually to four students “who demonstrate skill and creativity in the application of library information resources for research papers/projects completed in fulfillment of a course requirement.”

Also mentioned were items in the process of being implemented:

- A new GSU Library website (using the University template and RedDot CMS), which is being beta tested and is scheduled to go live by the fall semester.
- Expansion of the article desktop delivery service for faculty members to include anyone who is teaching or taking classes away from the downtown campus.

The physical structure of the GSU Library, consisting of two buildings connected by a four-story bridge, contains approximately 300,000 square feet of space and holds an estimated 1.4 million volumes. In the first 10 months of FY10, 1.5 million people came through the door of the library, exceeding the number (1,469,026) for all 12 months of FY09. This growth is despite a more restrictive access policy introduced this fiscal year, and it continues a trend that began with the library renovations completed in FY07. Last year’s figure reflected a 47% increase over FY08, which in turn reflected an 88% increase over FY07.

Library responsibilities have been expanding dramatically during the past decade; however, there has been relatively little increase in staffing or financial support. Even before the recent budget cutbacks, funding for library collections, operations and staff over the past decade at GSU was failing to keep pace with enrollment growth, increased use of the facility and the escalating costs (well above general inflation rates) of scholarly journal and database subscriptions. In FY08, before the downturn in state revenues and subsequent budget cuts, GSU ranked near the bottom (above only Florida International University and the University of Central Florida) in per-capita library expenditures among 36 universities in the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL). Of particular note,
and largely a product of limited budget growth, is the lack of progress made in addressing Georgia State University’s 2005-2010 Strategic Plan goal of membership in the Association of Research Libraries.

However, as we look ahead at the future of both GSU and the Library, of more importance are the areas of opportunity -- places where change, innovation and new services will make a difference to the campus community. Currently, undergraduate students are well-served by the library and enjoy an acceptable level of support in terms of both collections and services. It is in support of faculty and graduate students where there is an identified need for increased collections and services. Four general topic areas have been identified via library employee comments, user surveys and focus group reports, and are also being discussed by the research library community. Any advances made will serve the entire university community, but particularly where the need is greatest - GSU faculty and graduate students.

**Services** – The success of the library of the future will be a result of the services it provides. These services will need to be responsive to user needs, using appropriate technologies as necessary, and must be flexible in order to address inevitable changes in the way information is used and delivered.

**Scholarly communications** – This covers a variety of topics including authors’ rights, open access issues, the institutional repository, and electronic theses and dissertations.
- **Action** – Develop, in concert with others on campus, a program for providing the GSU community with information about scholarly communication issues and how they affect publishing opportunities, University costs, and the availability of published materials.
- **Action** – Work through the committee structure of the University Senate to create community support for a GSU open access policy.
- **Action** – Create a position description for a library point person for scholarly communication issues; advertise and hire.
- **Action** – Provide improved methods of access to the University’s institutional repository (Digital Archive @ GSU), facilitate faculty submissions, and provide appropriate connections to the University’s faculty information management system.

**Cyberinfrastructure** – The University must develop the strategies, tools and mechanisms to support the storage and preservation of born-digital content. Effective this fall, the National Science Foundation plans to require that all proposals include a two-page data management plan. Though this is not a library initiative, the GSU Library’s existing information organization and preservation skills will enhance this endeavor.
- **Action** – Develop, in concert with others on campus, a program for providing the GSU community with information, support and training about cyberinfrastructure issues.
- **Action** – Work with others on campus to begin to develop the cyberinfrastructure needed to support the research endeavor on campus.

**Return on Investment** – A trend in libraries is to identify ways in which the value of investing in the library can be quantified. Though relatively easy to do for small or public libraries, this project is more challenging for large research libraries.
- **Action** – Determine whether any of the existing protocols for demonstrating library value have widespread potential and validity, focusing on how these might impact different funding models for
the library. Recent work being done by some of the library professional organizations is of particular interest.

**Ubiquity** – With the increased use of mobile devices by all populations, the library website and services must be easily viewable and usable with mobile devices.

- **Action** – Create mobile services (apps) that will provide users with, for example, catalog searching, real-time computer availability, reservations for group study rooms, hours or Ask A Librarian services.
- **Action** – Facilitate development of services and tools that will provide improved discovery and access to locally created content. This would include theses, dissertations, articles, books, working papers, technical reports, conference proceedings and other materials that require description, storage and curation.

**Request fulfillment** – We cannot divorce the cost of purchasing content from the cost of cataloging, processing and housing it, be it print-based or electronic. An additional component is the cost of acquiring content via “leasing” arrangement (e.g., interlibrary loan) or through shared digital resources (e.g., Google Book Search, HathiTrust). Ultimately, our users tend not to care where the content comes from as long as it is readily available.

- **Action** – Provide seamless resource delivery – one place to ask for materials, whether we own them or not. This will include desktop delivery whenever possible; books purchased on request; and easier in-house access to print-based materials when electronic delivery isn’t possible.
- **Action** – Identify collaborative methods of long-term retention of materials.

**Collections** – The nature of library collections is changing. As the costs for new materials rise, we must identify new ways of providing what our users need to be successful students, teachers and researchers.

**Electronic access** – Based on user feedback, the library must focus as much as possible on the electronic delivery of content. This is particularly true of journal literature where increasingly, and in all disciplines, evidence suggests that electronic access is preferred by faculty and students. (We have previously seen this trend in the sciences but are now also seeing it in the social sciences and humanities.) Less well-defined is the future role of electronic books. To some extent how this develops will be driven by available devices and formats, by rights management and by the extent to which textbook publishers embrace this technology. However, the vision of a completely digital research library is unlikely so we must continue to develop and support both electronic and paper-based collections.

- **Action** – Provide the campus (in collaboration with others on campus) with test-bed opportunities to experiment with using electronic readers.
- **Action** – Create an internal group charged with exploring and evaluating emerging hardware and software for the access, presentation, communication, customization and sharing of digital media and e-content.
- **Action** – Continue to focus acquisitions budgets on electronic materials, including investigation of a transactional model, while trying to avoid the inherent risks to this approach as evidenced by Big Deal packages and long-term access issues.
• Action – Create a position description for a library point person to provide virtual library services for the GSU community; advertise and hire.

**Creative partnerships** – We must identify creative partnerships – both on and off campus – in order to leverage available resources. To date, most attention has been paid to partnerships with other research libraries in the state and region and to the University System of Georgia’s GALILEO initiative. Though these relationships are very valuable and must continue to be nurtured and supported, new partnerships must be developed. On campus, we need to expand our partnerships with faculty members and to further develop the collaborations that are providing students with the information skills they need to be successful students and citizens.

• Action – Pursue additional off-campus partnerships. Evidence of a shift in thinking comes from the ASERL, which has “deep, innovative strategic partnerships” as a component of a new strategic plan. (ASERL has recently proposed a groundbreaking way to collaboratively manage Federal Depository Library Program collections in the Southeast that may ultimately serve as a model for the rest of the country.)

• Action – Develop a campus initiative that links new faculty hires, new campus initiatives and grant funding to a program that provides library “start-up” funding.

**Special collections** – A distinguishing characteristic of a research library is the nature of its unique collections. The special collections at GSU are a component of the University’s identity: they reflect the University in that they are largely collections of materials from the second half of the 20th century. They are good collections, but they could be better.

• Action – Make the special collections of the GSU Library more accessible, particularly to researchers using electronic means to find them. This will require obtaining appropriate permissions to digitize materials and describing, storing and curating/migrating digitized content.

• Action – Proactively identify and seek out materials that will enhance or expand the existing special collections at GSU.

**Spaces** – The GSU Library is seen as a vibrant campus center, but space limitations restrict our ability to respond to the changing demands placed on us by our users. As the University continues to expand, library space must also be expanded.

**Space for graduate students** – Though the library does a good job of providing space for undergraduates, graduate students have expressed a desire for space that could be used exclusively by them – a place that offers a scholarly atmosphere that is conducive to serious research. This is historically a role for libraries, but library space is limited. Thus, we must be creative and identify alternatives.

• Action – Identify spaces on campus available to graduate students that offer a scholarly atmosphere conducive to serious research. Determine what kind of library space should be made available to complement these campus spaces.

• Action – Create a graduate student lounge space in the library and evaluate its use over a period of one academic year.

**Off-site storage** – As demands for library space change, we must look at ways to respond to those demands. Off-site storage of less frequently used materials would free up library space to be used for
new purposes that are more supportive of teaching and learning, such as tutoring or collaborative learning spaces.

- **Action** – Investigate options for shared storage with other libraries in the Atlanta area or throughout the state, including the possibility of public-private partnerships.
- **Action** – Identify space on campus that could be used for either permanent or temporary storage of less frequently used materials.

**Special Collections and University Archives** – Currently, collections from this unit are housed in five locations on campus. The dispersed nature of the collection poses difficulties; for example, researchers generally must make arrangements in advance to gain access to material in which they’re interested. This problem will only worsen as new collections like the Atlanta Journal-Constitution Photo Archives are added.

- **Action** – Identify, in concert with others on campus, additional space on campus where new special collections can be stored.
- **Action** – Identify, in concert with others on campus, appropriate space for combining all Special Collections and University Archives into one space where staff and services can be provided to researchers.

**People** – We are increasingly seeing the need for librarians with a less-traditional skill set. We need both to hire new people who already have these skills and to also help current employees acquire new skills – experience with scholarly communications issues, metadata creation, using new media and technology, etc. – so they may better serve the GSU community. Additionally, only 18 librarians provide support to all of the departments, institutes, centers, and initiatives on campus, meaning there are academic areas of the University either unserved or underserved by the library.

- **Action** – Identify areas needing additional disciplines-specific support from the library. Create position descriptions as needed; advertise and hire.
- **Action** – Identify skills needed to support the GSU community better and either provide training to existing staff or create new positions, advertise and hire.

**Final Thoughts**

In addition to the four areas discussed, there are perhaps some economies of scale that might be realized by working more collaboratively with others on campus. Though relationships with the College of Law Library and with the campus Division of Information Systems and Technology are strong, we need to ensure that we foster these relationships and make sure that all opportunities for collaboration are pursued. A companion issue is to ensure that as the University evolves and grows, the necessary infrastructure is in place to support that growth, not only in the library but with appropriate and available technology, space, and people.

There are budget implications to the action items noted above. The budget for the GSU Library has not kept up with the aspirations or growth of the University. One possible recourse for the library is to investigate more fee-based services for the GSU community and other library users. More fundraising is also a component, but this is unlikely to completely fill the gap between available monies and needed services, collections, space and people. As the University enters into a capital campaign, it is worth considering the creation of an environment in which the library (as well as other “infrastructure” entities on campus) shares in the fund-raising successes of all campus units.

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Finally, we are committed to being the library that the University wants us to be. We will follow where Georgia State University’s new strategic plan takes us, and will also provide leadership in realizing new possibilities for the Georgia State University Library.