External Reviewer's Report
University Library
Sonoma State University

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Executive Summary

The University Library at the Jean and Charles Schulz Information Center is a user-centered and academically strong academic library, offering a full range of library resources and services aligned with the mission and programs of Sonoma State University. The University Library is well-regarded by the campus for being student-oriented and service-oriented. The entrepreneurial efforts to develop innovative library services by the library faculty are notable. Unfortunately, the sustainability of these efforts suffer because of staff turn-over and limited resources. As the University Library faces a change in leadership, due to the retirement of the current Dean, this program review is well-timed for the faculty to review its work and benefit from the review process. In this report, I reflect on strengths of the organization as well as identify areas for potential improvements in light of current challenges.

External Review Process

This report is the product of an external review of the University Library. The external review was comprised of an analysis of the University Library Program Review Self-Study and a virtual site visit, which was conducted via Zoom on April 25-26, 2002. I also reviewed the websites of

the University Library and Sonoma State University as well as the University Library Faculty Evaluation Criteria, Liaison Roles: An Overview, the Library Curriculum Philosophy, and documents related to space planning and upgrades for the Jean and Charles Schulz information Center. This is the first time the University Library has done a program review.

During the virtual site visit, I met with Kaitlin Springmier, Interim Library Faculty Chair; Laura Krier, Past Library Faculty Chair; Karen Schneider, Dean; Jonathan Smith, Interim Assistant Dean of Technology and Access Services; Lynn Prime, Special Collections Librarian; members of the RTP Committee; Technical Services; Access Services; the library faculty; and, a group of undergraduate student employees from the University Library. In addition, I met with Karen Moranski, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Stacey Bosick, Interim Associate Vice President of Academic Programs.

I want to commend the University Library for a comprehensive program self-study document and for ensuring high levels of staff engagement in the external review virtual site visit. Kaitlin Springmier deserves particular recognition for organizing the site visit and then pivoting to a virtual visit on short notice due to pandemic-related complications.

Commendations

Strategic Plan. The University Library has a well-developed strategic plan. The mission and vision are compelling and informed by the "Core Values of Librarianship" articulated by the American Library Association. The five strategic priorities reflect attention to campus context and alignment with campus goals. Goals and objectives for each program area are clearly articulated and set clear direction for implementation efforts.

Curriculum. The Library Curriculum Philosophy articulates a clear vision for the educational role of the University Library and the pedagogical stance of the library faculty. It is aligned with current professional standards, including the "Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education" and the Standards for Libraries in Higher Education" from the Association of College and Research Libraries. The Library Curriculum Philosophy provides a theoretical foundation for the University Library's Program and Learning Outcomes (Self-Study, pages 21-25). The Learning Outcomes are particularly notable for the developmental levels identified for each outcome, which identify thereby not only graduating competencies for students but also trajectories of learning and development over the course of students collegiate experiences.

User-Centric Services. The focus on service to the campus community permeates throughout the library. Whether one is talking with a tenured library faculty or a part-time student worker, emphasis on ensuring that the library is supporting the information needs of the campus faculty and students is paramount. The pride that library employees take in the breadth and depth of their service portfolio – which is quite impressive for a library of its size – is warranted. The technology loan program that was quickly put into place during the pandemic is a signature example of the kind of entrepreneurial and user-centric service mindset permeating the organization.

Notable Challenges

Employee Burnout and Attrition. The pandemic has brought concerns about employee burnout and attrition to all of higher education and the University Library at Sonoma State University is no exception. Library faculty in particular seem to be struggling under a sense of a relentlessly

increase in the scope of their work, especially in light of employee turn-over. This sense is particularly accurate with respect to outreach to campus, which has been particularly hampered by the pandemic and previously the disruptions due to wildfires in the years before. Of particular concern as well is the attrition of library faculty of color.

Dean/Faculty Relations. The faculty vote of no confidence in the Dean and the conflicts prior to and following on continue to affect the University Library's climate and organizational effectiveness. Though some expressed regret at the circumstances, the tensions revealed themselves in multiple conversations during the virtual site visit. I understand that a consultant had been retained to investigate the situation and make recommendations to address the situation. I did not review that report and so am not able to offer any observations on the effectiveness of the interventions; however, it must be noted that the distrust and frustrations continue to press upon the ability to envision how the library faculty and dean can work together productively.

Recommendations

Staffing. As mentioned above, the breadth and depth of the service portfolio of the University Library is notable given its size. Most immediately, with three librarians leaving at the end of the semester, it is critical that hiring occur expeditiously. Attention to not only recruiting but also retaining faculty of color is particularly crucial given the demographic make-up of the student body. Then, in the coming years, given the challenges that the campus is facing to maintain previous levels of enrollment as well as pandemic-induced changes in how faculty and students use library resources and services, a review of staffing allocations relative to specific

services and commitments is recommended. Aligning staffing with the evolving library service portfolio will enable the most efficient and effective outcomes from limited staff as well as identify areas where additional investments in library faculty and staff are needed. Benchmarking against other four-year collegiate libraries with similar portfolios (e.g., including archives and special collections, a makerspace, etc.) will also assist in identifying needed investments.

Assessment. The University Library has laid a significant foundation for a program evaluation effort through the strategic plan and the goals and outcomes articulated for each program area and the efforts to document activity for each program area. The University Library has excellent documentation of the inputs and outputs for its programs. The next step is to establish an assessment effort to evaluate the outcomes of the programs for their effectiveness. Doing so will enable the University Library to tell the story of the impact of its programs and to make changes as indicated if programs are not attaining their intended goals.

Preparation for Leadership Change. With the upcoming search for a new Dean, there is an opportunity to "re-set" the relationship between the library faculty and the Dean. If there is the possibility of using the search process to establish a culture of collaboration between library administration and library faculty, the new Dean will not have to labor under the organizational tensions of the past years and the library faculty will be able to have confidence in administrative support for their work. In particular, clarity around what is the purview of the library faculty and what is the purview of the Dean – an ensuring this is shared during the interviewing process – is important to avoiding future confusions and conflicts. Investing in

some organizational development support and coaching would be a worthwhile investment to stabilize the library as an organization and develop a strategy to ensure its continued contributions to faculty and student success.

Conclusion

The University Library and Sonoma State University are experiencing challenging times, particularly with respect to confidence in leadership and financial stability. Nonetheless, the University Library is poised to emerge from the pandemic disruption on a trajectory to further strengthen its focus on enabling student learning, development, and success as well as supporting faculty inquiry and instruction through hiring new library faculty and establishing an assessment program that will guide future program development.