

June 17, 2010

To: William Fry, Dean of Faculty

From: Mary Beth Norton

Re: Annual Report of Faculty Library Board

It might be said that the Library Board had an interesting year (as in the purported old Chinese curse, “May you live in interesting times”). The year started in effect, if not in actuality, with the lunchtime faculty forum on the library held in G10 Biotech center during the fall semester. At that forum, faculty members from throughout the university vigorously and loudly expressed their concerns about changes to, and cuts in, the library system. What the library board took away from that forum was the need for better communication among the board, the library administration, and the faculty at large in this time of budget cuts, “reimagining Cornell,” and general financial stringency. Some of the problems were caused by false rumors (the entire Uris duplicate collection had been secretly sold for \$1/volume!—false, the library board had approved the sale last year, and Tsinghua University had paid considerably more than that); others, by faculty members’ understandable desire to prevent the closing of individual libraries serving particular units.

One outcome of the forum indirectly related to the library board was the formation of a Humanities Collections Committee to work with the library and serve as a liaison to the humanities departments in A & S. I participated in this committee as the liaison from the library board. The committee proved very useful in helping the library staff reach a decision about which books to relocate permanently from Olin to Uris and in discussing other matters of concern. Other similar committees organized generally by discipline might also be helpful, but since the humanities departments see the library as the equivalent of their laboratory, they are the people primarily concerned with the library functions in general. In the coming year we can explore the possibility of establishing other similar committees.

The chief task of the board subsequently has been reviewing and commenting on proposals presented by separate task forces established to examine various “satellite” libraries. The Physical Science Library was closed during the course of the year, having already been slated for closure last year. This year, the board considered at length proposals involving the Vet, Entomology, and Engineering Libraries. A similar report is still to come from the clustered libraries of Hotel/JGSM/ILR. The best model for such task forces is that from the outset they should include representatives of all the stakeholders—faculty, grad and undergrad students, library staff, and anyone else interested (e.g., the interns at the Vet School).

We requested further information from the Vet School and after a second discussion approved a report that projected reductions in budget but kept the library open. On Entomology, we approved a plan to close the library, but with a considerable lead time and with plans for significant digitization of key reference works. Most of the books will be moved to Mann. The crucial issue for the Entomology library was not the regular

cost of service but rather the need for a large onetime payment for new movable shelves and other renovations, requiring funding that the College of Ag & Life Sciences did not have available. Finally, the Engineering task force recommended that the library as such be closed, although the space would be retained for individual study and group work. Books would be primarily moved to Uris (in its new configuration) and other libraries on central campus. The board accepted the recommendation and gave it to the librarian to forward to the provost. He has accepted the recommendation but it has not yet been discussed with the dean of engineering at this writing, though it will be soon. Appointed task forces will oversee implementation of all these recommendations.

In the latter months of the academic year, the chair of the library board reported monthly to the Senate on the unit library reviews. I assume that practice will continue as long as the reviews do. I believe this was useful in ensuring that the Senate was well informed about the process of the reviews.

The aim of the library board throughout has been to ensure adequate faculty input into these painful decisions about closures and reductions in services or in collections. We believe we have done that. It is important for the future to ensure that the library board itself represents the broadest possible faculty constituencies; having members from a wide variety of fields has been and will continue to be key in maintaining our credibility with the faculty as a whole. The two student members have also been excellent participants in our deliberations.