9-15-2014 Library Committee Meeting Minutes

Present: Clem Guthro, Ed Yeterian, Lisa McDaniels, Marilyn Pukkila, Michael Burke, Michael Loginoff, Raffael Scheck, Rob Weisbrot, John Turner, and Adrian Blevins

John reminded everyone of Miller's grand reopening and said that we would need to reschedule our October 14 meeting because of a conflict.

Clem discussed the usage data he had collected in response to the committee's request at its August meeting. The data shows that circulation rates are falling. This includes books from our own collection, MaineCat, and NetExpress. ILL requests are also falling; most requests are for articles.

The committee speculated as to the causes of the drop in circulation rates and seemed to agree that a combination of factors including changes in student attitudes toward research and advancements in technology (moodle, Netflix) add together to account for the drop. The committee noted that our circulation rates are in alignment with trends in academic libraries in the US.

The committee discussed the reference desk and changes in usage there. Apparently there's a whole body of research looking at this issue. Students do ask for help from research librarians, but not as often as they used to, and there's a complicated issue of how a chronically small library can successfully (i.e. with the correct expertise) staff a reference desk. There are currently 7 research librarians at Colby, only four of which are full-time.

The committee wondered about students' general research skills and discussed this in relation to W1 courses. Were all W1 course instructors taking students to the library for training on current research methods? Should the library committee recommend that they do?

The committee discussed the placement and usage of microfilm machines.

The committee discussed the space we have for growing our collection and each of the college's libraries and in the storage facility; currently we have enough space for 4 years of expansion in Miller and 40 years in storage.

The committee talked in philosophical terms about contemporary culture and students’ preference for doing research on Google: was it a college's job to match cultural trends or buck them? It appeared to be the committee’s general feeling that an academic institution's job is to set standards and cultural norms. In other words, the committee seemed to feel that if there were not enough librarians to help professors teach students how to do research in libraries that it should state in its eventual recommendations that not to increase the library's staff would ultimately impede students' intellectual growth.

Clem pointed out that the storage facility also has no staff, whereas there are 4 full-time people to staff Williams College's storage facility.

The committee discussed timing logistics of getting its report to the faculty by February, and decided to use President Greene's aspirational list of colleges for its comparisons rather than the typical NESCAC schools.
Clem said that the primary difference between Colby's libraries and the libraries of the aspirational colleges is one of a chronic and inherent lack of space: Colby's allotted library space is very small. Clem says that we also need a budget for books—that it makes no sense to wish for more book miles if we have an inadequate budget for new books. Clem also pointed out that we’re working with Fire Code constraints, too, in terms of what we can change (i.e. how far from the ceiling the library can store books). The center stacks also appear to be holding up the building in load-bearing ways; they can’t be moved unless we want Miller to collapse.

Our discussion ended with a plan to compare Colby’s library resources (book miles, staffing, etc.) to the library resources of at least some of President Greene's aspirational schools. The committee also plans to discuss requests from David Suchoff and Elizabeth Leonard at its next meeting.