

**GRINNELL COLLEGE LIBRARIES**

**DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW**

**EXTERNAL REVIEWER REPORT**

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## **Introduction**

The following observations and recommendations are based on our review of *Dreaming with Both Eyes Open* -- the Grinnell College Libraries impressive self study -- as well as our encounters with faculty, staff and students during our April campus visit. Both the document and the visit were extremely well organized and effective in conveying the library's achievements and challenges. The full engagement of library staff and campus constituencies in the drafting of the self study has been a very open and productive exercise and has laid a sound foundation for the work ahead.

We particularly commend your decision to forego extensive discussion of space planning issues in this phase of your review. By first defining and refining your programmatic goals, you will undoubtedly be able to make better decisions about space planning over the next few years.

## **Information Literacy and Reference Services**

In the mission critical area of information literacy and reference services, the key challenge posed in the Grinnell Libraries self study is "to find the best balance among our teaching-related activities that will allow us to advance information literacy at Grinnell College." The issue of balance is an important one, given the wide range of current offerings in this area, and given the longstanding unrealized goal of providing information literacy instruction across the curriculum and throughout a Grinnell student's years at the institution.

We found widespread support and enthusiasm for the library component of first-year Tutorials. Faculty and librarians agree that this approach is an appropriate and effective introduction to library staff and services for new students. Faculty appreciate the freedom they have in working with librarians to structure customized approaches for each tutorial, and they value the collegiality of this effort.

We see Tutorials as a great opportunity to begin building consulting librarian relationships with faculty and would hope that, as much as possible, Tutorial assignments can be made with those liaison relationships in mind. Librarian efforts to develop generally supported learning outcomes for the Tutorial

program are important, particularly as they set a foundation for the definition of such outcomes in relation to more advanced coursework.

The work that the Biology department has done to integrate information literacy instruction in their introductory course was often cited as a model for success in building disciplinary research skills. The self study appropriately recognizes the commitment it will take to replicate this approach in other majors. We believe, however, that this is the approach that will yield the desired results. Consulting librarians, with a thorough knowledge of departmental curricula, need to work with faculty to find effective models specific to each discipline. In-class instruction, tied to learning outcomes and supported by course-related web pages, subject guides, and other enhancements can become as central to upper division work as the Tutorial experience is for first year students.

Library Labs, despite their labor intensiveness, are also an effective source of support for students. They reach students at a point of need and help students appreciate the expertise librarians can bring to such exchanges.

Other reference support services will benefit from increased publicity. We particularly encourage the active marketing of chat and online reference through prominent positioning on the Libraries' website, posters, and other avenues. We found some evidence that the on call approach to reference desk staffing was not working reliably. We recommend some expansion of late morning and noontime in person coverage of the reference desk. We also strongly suggest that the Burling Library pilot the use of well trained students to expand the number of hours the reference desk is staffed. These students might also be of assistance to librarians in web page development and other course-related work.

The information literacy and reference services outlined above are those we found to be the most likely to have an impact on a significant number of students at a time when they have a particular need for support. Conversely, we believe the Libraries should no longer offer the for-credit courses (Library 100 and the special-topics 4-unit course). They reach relatively few students and do not directly contribute to an expansion of a disciplinary-specific approach to information literacy, a primary and longstanding goal of the Libraries. We do suggest exploring the option of offering supplementary credits connected to research-intensive courses on the model of the credit available through the writing center for writing-intensive courses.

We respect the long history of Library 100 and the recent investment in the creation of the 4-credit course. However, the study itself recognizes the need to

direct time and energy to the efforts likely to provide the best support for student learning. We believe that the Tutorials, course-integrated upper division instruction, and Library Labs can all be tied to the development of stronger consulting librarian relationships and have the best chance of contributing to an information literacy program that meets the evolving needs of Grinnell students and faculty.

### **Information Discovery and Access**

Service and technology changes made by the libraries over the last few years have led to significant improvements in access and discovery on the part of Grinnell students and faculty. We were struck during our visit by the number of faculty and students who could identify improvements like web-based delivery of interlibrary loan (ILL) articles and the wider access to articles published in Elsevier journal titles through the “pay per view” program. These are very popular initiatives and we encourage you to look for more ways to remove barriers between your users and the information they seek.

The impact of recent changes in how you enable off-campus access is somewhat more mixed. Those who have discovered the change, are very pleased, but many users had given up on off-campus access and have not yet heard the message that the libraries have made changes. Better marketing, timed for when large numbers of users might be interested in off-campus access, (summer, term breaks, before international trips, etc.) will help. It is clear that you have made significant improvements since the 2007 LibQual survey indicated that your users were somewhat unsatisfied in the area of “information control” but as you noted in your self review, there is more to be done. We encourage your exploration of the ILLiad software and of RapidILL. As you note, both can enhance the user experience of ILL service and would help disintermediate ILL service for your users. Grinnell students and faculty are smart and know what they want. In ILL and in other areas of access and discovery, give them access and then get out of the way.

The new website has the potential to be far more user friendly than the existing site. However, the comments of two external reviewers are not to be trusted in this regard. We did not explore this issue while at Grinnell, but if you have not yet done so, we urge you to conduct usability testing of the website with students and faculty. In your self review you note that a “next gen catalog” would probably do away with the separate tabs for searching different types of

information. We agree and note further that the first tab presented to your users is the local catalog. This is illustrative of your continued focus on local resources. Your users, like library users throughout higher education have moved well beyond thinking of discovery as focused on local collections. Such collections are now just one part, and an increasingly small part, of a wider discovery process. We urge you to consider changing your focus to this broader discovery layer. The components of this broader layer will vary according to the specific academic community. The librarians of Grinnell, in consultation with their users, are in the best position to determine what resources should be searched in combination with local resources (but the Center for Research Libraries, and Google Scholar are obvious candidates) and which of the tools that provide discovery and access services should be employed at Grinnell. All we urge is that you move quickly to implement one of these tools. Software like WorldCat Local from OCLC, Encore from Innovative Interfaces Inc. (III), Summon (forthcoming this summer) and Aquabrowser from SerialsSolutions, may not provide all the functionality of a next generation Integrated Library System (ILS) but they will help position the Grinnell libraries as the preferred discovery mechanism for Grinnell students and faculty and thus also help your information literacy and reference services remain relevant to your users.

Implementing such discovery tools and software like ILLiad will also decrease your reliance on III systems. You are overly invested in III. While the use of software from one vendor has the advantage of aiding interoperability and enabling you to develop expertise in these systems, it discourages your expertise in other systems and the next generation catalogs that interest you. "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." If all you have is III software, III solves all problems. You note on page 15 of your self review that many of your systems work "well enough." III is an example of this problem. We will discuss issues of staff and organization that might help you develop and focus the expertise to more rapidly implement next generation systems.

### **Collections and Collection Development**

In speaking with faculty and students at Grinnell we found a high level of satisfaction with the on site collections available to the campus community. We also found a general recognition that with regard to serial collections, Grinnell had been conservative in making a transition from print on paper to online access, opting for a high level of redundancy in available formats and the security of local ownership in addition to licensed access. However, recent

developments have positioned the Libraries to be able to act more aggressively in increasing the number of online-only subscriptions. Such a shift has the obvious and important advantage of allowing the collection development budget to be devoted to a greater number of unique resources that build upon the already rich holdings at Grinnell.

The experiment with the “pay per view” model for most Elsevier journals seems to have been a great success, so much so that even those print titles reserved for a browsing collection might now be moved to online access. We encourage expansion of this model to help address the community’s desire for increased access to electronic resources.

Working with faculty to accomplish a more rapid transition to online access to serials also offers librarians an important opportunity to share current information about the types of national and regional safety nets that have been created to insure reliable long term access to this literature. Faculty seem not to have received sufficient information about the collaborative initiatives underway to provide this reassurance, though the self study should help begin that dissemination. Grinnell’s lack of strong consortial relationships with state and regional research institutions has also contributed to a sense that the college must somehow bear sole responsibility for serving as an archive for these publications. If Grinnell had a greater role in state and regional collaboration, a role that was visible to users through library services, faculty might develop a greater understanding of the benefits of collaboration in terms of preservation of scholarly literature as well.

The transition to an increased reliance on and abundance of electronic resources also presents an opportunity for library staff to rethink their approach to local processing of these collections. Different formats and different modes of access suggest the possibility for different entry points to information. The local catalog is unlikely to be the place of first resort for satisfying user needs for access to electronic resources.

With regard to collection development, we encountered a variety of levels of participation by faculty. We believe that faculty involvement in book selection is highly desirable at a college like Grinnell. Availability of Choice Online might be a helpful addition to distribution of the Choice cards. Grinnell might consider initiating an online slips program to provide faculty with information on recent publications--a type of approval plan that is easier to manage than the actual delivery of approval books. Most large book vendors that serve the academic library market (companies like YBP and Blackwell for instance) offer faculty e-

mail notification of recently published books based on profiles of subject interests. They also offer access to databases of available books and e-books. These can help faculty become more engaged in library collection building.

Selection responsibility within the library should be shared and should be aligned with consulting librarian assignments. The self study assigns collecting responsibility for all subject areas to the Collection Development and Preservation Librarian (p. 24), but later mentions a recent assignment of these duties as part of the role of the consulting librarians (p.38). We strongly favor the latter approach as an important element in the definition and evolution of the consulting librarian role.

Use of collections beyond the Grinnell campus has been characterized as relatively low. We believe that improvements in the interlibrary loan service, such as the recent desktop delivery of articles, will increase that demand. The Libraries' exploration of ILLiad, RapidILL, and other enhancements to interlibrary loan should be expedited. Furthermore, implementation of a union catalog or services such as WorldCat Local have been shown to have a dramatic impact on demand by increasing awareness of resources beyond those held on a particular campus.

The Grinnell community can take justifiable pride in having developed an impressive library collection. The nature of these collections and the rate of their growth have obvious implications for building-related decisions. The science library's substantial investment in compact shelving for print journals but lack of an instruction classroom represents such a choice. The time is right for initiating a campus-wide conversation about collections at Grinnell, a discussion indisputably tied to its space planning deliberations.

### **Special Collections and Digital Initiatives**

The Grinnell community has a growing awareness of and appreciation for the materials in Special Collections and their potential role in active support of the curriculum. The Special Collections Librarian's service as consulting librarian for history is one natural way to strengthen that awareness. The Burling Library's exhibit program has been another way to highlight the treasures in these collections.

In moving forward, we encourage Grinnell library staff to explore how their collections fit into a wider Iowa context. The rare book and postcard collections might suggest opportunities for collaboration with other Iowa libraries.

With regard to the digitization initiatives, the Libraries' recent support for campus conversations across departmental boundaries is, in general, a very important development. The digital or potentially digital resources held in a number of departments are collections that ultimately can be brought together in more easily searchable and web-accessible form. The Libraries' expertise in digitization issues, such as those involving metadata structures, will be important contributions to the campus planning in this area. Assessment of the adequacy of the current MDID platform to support a more diverse set of resources and to enable classroom presentation as well as individual use is a logical step.

Involving faculty in helping to set priorities for digitization projects is also important. Short-term, focused projects will be more manageable, given the many competing commitments of the staff. We recommend reallocating and retraining some library processing staff to provide greater support in this area as well as using highly trained student employees.

In addition to collaboration within Iowa, Grinnell might explore options for outside support from such agencies as IMLS, NEH, and CLIR to fund particular initiatives or to provide more general planning and training support for the campus-wide digitization program.

We are in strong agreement with the goals outlined on page 31 of the self study. In the main, the goals of Section 5 are designed to create a more substantial and collaborative campus infrastructure to support digitization projects going forward and to develop shared campus expertise in this area. This is the work that needs to be done. The LASR institutional repository project seems less likely to address an immediate need at Grinnell, but it too has promise as a collaborative effort. However, in addition to digitization of unique materials we also encourage you to develop digital finding aids and make those openly accessible at the network level. This will enable users, both at Grinnell and in the wider research community, to find out about collections housed at Grinnell. For more detail on this, see the Open Archives Initiative at <http://www.openarchives.org/> amongst other resources.

## **Partnerships, Collaboration and Cultivating Engagement**

The model of the freestanding college library, seeking to meet the information needs of its users through local collections and locally licensed resources, delivered via locally provided systems and software is doomed. Libraries that continue to pursue this model will exist on college campuses in twenty years, but their role on campus will be that of a museum, not a primary information resource for the campus community. By concentrating on local collections and licensed resources college libraries control a decreasing portion of the information universe with which our users work. Local systems (like the library based ILS) exist at a system level (the library) while our users increasingly work on the network level (the Web.) This is a recipe for obsolescence. Well-resourced libraries like Grinnell's may be able to avoid this fate better than most others, but they will do so at increased cost.

We support your conclusion that the future of Grinnell's libraries lies in concentrating on your consulting librarian partnerships with the faculty to develop the information literacy of Grinnell students, and on personalized information assistance to all users as they navigate an environment of abundant information. Therefore we encourage you to think of collections and systems as residing at the network level, so that you can concentrate your local efforts on partnerships with faculty and service to users.

Few areas of library operations are not strengthened by partnerships and these partnerships can be of many kinds. Collaboration and partnerships are crucial to a library's ability to make most effective use of its resources. A number of the people we met, both in and outside the libraries at Grinnell, mentioned existing and potential collaboration with private higher education institutions. While such relationships can be very effective, we encourage Grinnell not to restrict collaboration to agreements amongst similar institutions. There are numerous examples of statewide and regional consortia that include public and private libraries, and university and college libraries. Iowa is not a state that has a particularly good record of library cooperation, but there are a number of examples of successful consortia that have no central state funding. Examples include Orbis Cascade (which includes public, private, university, and college libraries) and the Boston Library Consortium (which includes Williams and Wellesley, amongst others.) Although Iowa may not be a leader in library cooperation, you are neighbors with a number of states that are; including Minnesota (Minitex) and Illinois (CARLI.) Think broadly. If statewide cooperation is not possible, is it possible to join groups across state lines? Academic libraries in the Mid-Atlantic States have done so through expansion of the Pennsylvania Academic Libraries Consortium Inc. (PALCI.)

Grinnell is a big player in small state. We are living in difficult economic times. You have the opportunity to use this crisis to your advantage. The state universities of Iowa (the smallest of which, UNI, has a collection that is not much larger than Grinnell's) may be more open to collaboration than they have been in the past, particularly with an institution of Grinnell's caliber. Richard, with his track record within ARL institutions and his excellent ability to communicate with diverse constituencies, should make it a priority to act as a catalyst for library collaboration within, and beyond, Iowa. To do so, he will need time. We will discuss this further in our section on staffing and organization. It is important that he is supported in this effort by librarians and staff who are professionally engaged outside Grinnell.

As you make clear in your self review, collaboration, partnerships, and engagement do not begin at the boundaries of campus. We encourage you to continue to develop your collaboration with other units on campus, particularly partnerships with Information Technology Services, the Writing Lab, and the Falconer Art Gallery. We encourage you to continue to explore ways in which ITS and the Libraries can work together. Migrating systems to the network level, beyond Grinnell's network, may be one fruitful area of cooperation with ITS at Grinnell and with other libraries; while CTS, the Writing Lab and the Falconer Gallery personnel can be partners in collaboration with the faculty.

As noted above, the librarians' role as consulting librarians is the key to your continued success. We support a broad definition of this role. There are indications in your self review, reinforced during our visit, that it is not clear to everyone in the Libraries that collection development is a key component of this consulting role. If the consulting librarian is to be seen as a valuable partner of faculty members, then control over collection resources (the ability to approve significant purchases etc.) is important. The Libraries have already worked to group consulting relationships with related disciplines together. More needs to be done. Individual relationships between librarian and faculty member still trump the consulting relationship. While such flexibility is good, you should find ways to encourage the development of relationships within the consulting arrangement. Also the consulting librarians need a clear set of expectations that are assessed with input from the appropriate faculty. Consulting librarians need to learn from each other's successes (Kevin could be used a model in this regard.) Finally, try and keep the relationship between departments and librarians as stable as possible. It is clear your faculty leave policy has a negative impact upon these consulting relationships.

It is clear from our short visit to Grinnell that the librarians, and many of the staff, are regarded as trusted information professionals. On many occasions members of the community commented favorably upon named individuals from the Libraries. This gives you a great platform from which to develop your relationships with faculty.

We think you are correct in deliberately excluding space planning from your self review. Until the campus community has arrived at a clear strategy concerning library services, including the vital issue of how those services are embedded within partnerships with other units on campus, it is too soon to discuss physical space. However, while that strategic planning takes place we do think you have a couple of relatively inexpensive physical changes you could make. Since the social center of campus has moved north, and particularly since the Grill left the Forum, a coffee shop in the Burling Library would increase traffic and help Burling recapture its role as a destination on campus. There is also a great need for group study spaces in Burling. We encourage you to think creatively about how such spaces may be carved out of the existing structure.

### **Staffing and Organization**

As noted in earlier sections of this report, individual librarians and many library staff are widely known and respected on campus. Faculty members have confidence in the librarians as information professionals. This is a solid base on which to build the future for library services at Grinnell.

Richard has very successfully embedded himself in the campus community and is a trusted information leader at Grinnell College. Faculty members also have a high level of confidence in the abilities of library staff, and many people we met during our visit made it clear that the self study has highlighted for the campus community the complexity of issues within the Libraries today. As noted elsewhere this is the first step in embedding librarians within teaching and learning at Grinnell. It also is a necessary precursor to library leadership in the migration from print to digital formats for library collections.

In the current economic situation the College is unlikely to increase library staffing levels, so it is especially important that existing staff resources be allocated in the most effective way. The organization of staff within Grinnell libraries needs to reflect and support library priorities. We encourage you to scrutinize every part of the organizational structure of Grinnell Libraries and

move from an organization focused on process – often legacy print processes – to one focused on service to users.

If Richard is to take advantage of his leadership potential (both on campus and at the state level) he needs to have more time to devote to these efforts; currently too many people report directly to the Librarian of the College. In addition he appears to be the default interim departmental supervisor during librarian leaves. Ultimately, no more than 4-5 individuals should report to Richard.

We encourage you to consider augmenting the Associate Librarian position with a similar leadership position focused on instructional services and assistance to users, given the strategic importance of initiatives in this area. Richard is well qualified to provide ultimate strategic digital development leadership, but digital development needs to be embedded throughout the organization on both the collections and instructional services sides of the organization.

Currently, librarians at Grinnell appear to regard management responsibilities as additions to their central role as faculty-librarians. If Grinnell Libraries are to successfully negotiate the transformation from a print-centric library to a more digitally focused library, librarians need to show leadership in reallocating staff, increasing efficiencies, and focusing on transforming library operations. This will take consistent attention to management and leadership. One recent example of such focus was the use of an outside cataloging consultant to introduce efficiencies into the cataloging workflow. But this was only a first step in what needs to be a more substantial reorganization. We encourage librarians in leadership positions to think in comprehensive and ambitious ways about the transformation of all workflows. As noted in earlier sections, we suggest you do nothing locally that can be done efficiently at the network level.

### **Answers to Special Questions**

1. See our report on information literacy. We propose that you develop course integrated information literacy instruction, building on the experience of the Tutorial and further developing instruction at the upper levels with a focus on introductions to the major and capstone experiences. We propose that you cease teaching credit bearing courses with one caveat; that you investigate the feasibility of a one credit “lab” based on the model already instituted by the Writing Lab. In terms of individual reference we propose that you increase hours slightly in the

- late morning and at lunch time and investigate the use of student peer reference providers.
2. We do not think that credit bearing information literacy courses taught by librarians are the best use of limited librarian time. They are very labor intensive and do not reach enough students to have an impact on the overall information literacy of Grinnell students.
  3. We do not assess the readiness of departments. As you continue to develop your consulting librarian relationships, librarians should be looking for opportunities to partner with faculty to provide course integrated instruction in a variety of modes. If these opportunities do indeed develop, then the department is ready. One way to encourage readiness would be to offer summer stipends or some combination of incentives for faculty to work with librarians to develop desired disciplinary outcomes and to chart a course for integrating instruction in the upper division. Word of mouth among faculty will help you build on departmental successes. At Reed we also have made good use of recent graduates in a major to assist us in planning upper division instruction to support that major.
  4. At Reed we have developed such a model. Students (4-6 at any given time) who interview successfully for the job receive considerable training and first staff the desk in the company of a librarian. When fully trained, they are scheduled at the reference desk 8-10pm on weekdays and Saturday and Sunday afternoons. They also take shifts at the circulation desk where we have recently established an information/reference service point.
  5. We encourage you to maintain a watching brief over access only models of multimedia delivery. Such services are developing rapidly but the ownership model is still dominant. Some of this dominance is explained by the relative conservatism of the teaching faculty who make heavy use of multimedia resources. As you continue to develop your role as consulting librarians and your expertise in digital media resources you should watch for "game changing" opportunities in this area, which also are likely to present additional opportunities for collaboration with ITS.
  6. We encourage you to continue your digitization efforts with particular focus on collaboration with other institutions and with other units on campus, on open access at the network level wherever possible, and on the description and discovery of special collections (again at the network level) rather than the digitization of documents.
  7. We think it is vital that Grinnell lead, or at least act as a catalyst, for regional resource sharing.

8. As noted in detail elsewhere in this report, your organizational structure does not serve you well.
9. In colleges where librarians have faculty status the assignment to divisions is always idiosyncratic. At Rollins, librarians are members of the Expressive Arts division. At Augustana College, each librarian was a member of the division with which they had a liaison relationship. Go figure!
10. We think you are doing a good job of listening to your users and your continuing development of the consulting librarian model will only improve this. Instead, we think you need to do a better job of *talking* to your users. Many of the members of the Grinnell community with whom we spoke were surprised by the breadth of activities underway in the Libraries and in some cases we found a lack of knowledge about particular services provided by the Libraries. The concern about transitioning away from print journal collections could also be allayed with more active communication by library staff. We encourage you to devote more time and resources to marketing your services to the campus community.
11. For purposes of comparison, we would recommend eventually repeating the LibQUAL survey after you have had a chance to make progress toward your self study goals. However, because most campuses suffer from survey exhaustion and because the LibQUAL survey in particular is a less than perfect instrument, we would recommend waiting at least 2-3 years before repeating it.
12. The self review is very thorough and thoughtful. We commend you on such an excellent job. Now the real work begins!

## **Conclusion**

While the current challenges for all college libraries are formidable, so also are the opportunities to make ever stronger contributions to teaching and learning on our campuses. Grinnell Libraries are already making an important contribution to the educational mission of Grinnell. However, to take full advantage of these opportunities, you will need to make programmatic and organizational changes to focus your energies and resources. With strong leadership, a committed staff, a collaborative spirit and wide community support, this can be a transformational time for the Libraries. We wish you well as you move forward and we thank you for the opportunity to be part of this important work.