"Damnit! How can you have a great university without a great library?" Janet McCue catches your attention as well as mine by her provocative chapter title (In Successful Fundraising: Case Studies of Academic Libraries, American Research Libraries, 2001). More importantly, the exclamation captures the premier concern of the library in academe. Exactly ten years ago, as WMU trumpeted its future as a research university, my predecessor Lance Query had an article in Gatherings. Speaking as a new library dean, as I speak, he called his article "A Great University... A Great Library." Query noted the leadership of Diether Haenickie in building a research university and also in "recognizing the importance of quality teaching" for all students. He concluded: "As our mission and stature as a great research and teaching institution evolve, we would do well to understand that there has never been a great university without a great library." Ten years later, "damn it," I am struck by the continuing challenge, an ever-increasing concern, that is before WMU's leadership of libraries and its support of a research AND teaching institution.

The library has long been acknowledged as the heart of the scholarly enterprise, organizing ideas past and present, and providing access through every possible means. An open and free library on campus prepares students to be citizens of an open and free society. Moreover, with virtually unlimited electronic access, physical barriers of all kinds are almost non-existent. Information, hopefully leading to knowledge and wisdom through our educational efforts, is everywhere. Be it in Alexandria, Oxford, or Kalamazoo, we should revere the library as a noble place. Its holdings are our treasures; and these are at the reach of anyone desirous of learning. The student or sophisticated researcher can find millions of local holdings, but also "reach out," at any time, from anywhere to everywhere on earth.

Western Michigan University has made great strides towards reaching its full potential as a Carnegie classed Doctoral/Research University—Extensive Institution. Millions of research dollars awarded and doctoral degrees earned have lifted us to this ranking. Increases in the number of doctorates offered and bestowed illustrated part of the academic thrust, legacies of the presidency of Diether Haenickie. The infusion of multi-million dollar research grants into several colleges has added to our luster. Most recently, new state appropriations supporting biosciences research at the University and tying us to the local community underscore WMU's commitment to innovation and discovery, our future path. This has been a promising mark for the early tenure of Judith Bailey.

But where does the University Libraries fit into this institutional agenda? What has been and should be our role? Do difficult economic times thwart our mission? Where do we go from here when here means taking some steps backward or, at best, barely maintaining our status quo?

Mission This past academic year, the University Libraries reformulated a mission statement and established goals that mirror the tenets of the University at large. We strive to provide the bibliographic and information resources and services that will lead us to "a student-centered research University." That said, we focus on the acquiring, cataloguing and preserving of collections in all formats and, just as importantly, we facilitate access for patrons on and off campus. In so doing, the University Libraries serves as an inviting portal to knowledge and learning, the essential components of a student-centered research institution.

For over a decade, the dedicated personnel of the Libraries have championed technology as an integral part of our raison d'être. While technology is not an end in itself, it must exist as the means to achieve our mission. The Voyager library management system, our expanding Web presence, newly mounted e-reserves, the development of chat reference, growing numbers of e-books and e-articles, online tutorials, and electronic document delivery are some of the more readily visible means by which we serve better our patrons. Less visible to the student and scholar are the systems people who maintain and upgrade our virtual presence, and the technical staff who input, monitor, and maintain our multiple databases, both bibliographic and informational. More visible are the public service librarians who author and teach tutorials, subject guides, and "how to's" on research—and who are "here" for any kind of question in person, in class, by phone, and online electronically.

Not often recognized for their participation in instruction, the fact is that faculty librarians partner with departmental faculty to demystify the modern automated library for thousands of WMU students through classroom instruction sessions, hands-on practice, and one-on-one counseling. The symbiotic research team in public services far outpaces the most powerful search engines, e.g., google.com or altavista.com. These librarians make use of hundreds of "search engines" regardless of names such as periodical index, library catalog, directory, bibliography, full-text searching, search engine, or whatever needs to be used to find what is needed for a class, a paper, or a sophisticated research project.

Planning During 2002, an ad hoc library committee generated our mission and goals statement. During the same period, the Libraries' administrative and unit heads dreamed a dream of enhanced electronic development and maintenance, physical expansion and/or remodeling of our base facilities, more and better public services, and ever-increasing, interactive resources: human, print, and electronic. Presented to the provost in November, 2002, our five-year plan would have increased the number of academic librarians in areas of electronic resources and instruction, renovated facilities for teaching and learning, provided essential storage space, delved deeply into the digitization of our unique holdings, and enlarged the ranks of student employees. This planning process attempted to focus the future growth of University Libraries.

Cold reality struck in December 2002 and throughout early 2003. That reality impacted the nation, the State of Michigan, the University, and the Libraries. "[O]ur library acquisitions budget will be seriously cut down," President Bailey in a letter, dated July 24, 2003, and sent to students and parents, apprising them of an increase in fall
Damnit! The process of downsizing has been, needless to say, far less pleasurable than our fine dreams of the future. Inevitably, we must step back from a position that, in and of itself, was to be enhanced and expanded. To meet the anticipated cut to the base budget, some public service fiscal-year faculty have gone to academic year appointments, thereby reducing the quality and degree of public services offered during certain time periods such as the summer sessions. Student work hours have been reduced, and, as a result, some work will be delayed significantly or simply not done. Maintenance and upgrades to essential technologies have been delayed. Faculty development and travel funds have been eliminated. We anticipate gaps in service to departments; less flexibility in scheduling instructional sessions; shorter open hours of Waldo and all branches; closure of public services during breaks; delays in reshelving books, journals, and other materials; and an overall loss in service both in person and online. These are not only possible, but known outcomes of the first cutbacks in 2003.

The reductions have necessarily focused our attention on daily operations, infrastructure, workflow, and patron relations. We have been reexamining what we have done and had expected to do, but now must postpone or modify or reposition. The veterans on the University Libraries’ faculty and staff remind us that, on other occasions, state budgets have been inadequate, and notable holes (missing titles or years) have developed in our collections, especially in journal collections. Moreover, the entire University community is undergoing budget reverses and cutbacks. Indeed, because the University Libraries is an academic service, we have not suffered the greater losses of our non-academic, non-instructional colleagues.

What will be? The mission and goals of Western Michigan and the University Libraries will guide us through these times as we continue to serve the academic enterprise. Despite the immediate consequences and ongoing implications of the present economic climate, the morale of our faculty and staff is high. More than ever, we have been functioning as a team. The many members who comprise the advisory group for collections will use acquisitions dollars wisely. Their decisions will reflect the specific needs of advanced study and research, but will never bypass our teaching mission. We will move soberly ahead in purchasing technologies and resources that will enhance instruction and research. Still on our priority list are the image management system and the establishment of our digitization center that is described elsewhere in this issue. We have been able to fund replacement of terminals in the Libraries bringing the latest technology to one of our classrooms as well as all public terminals. In the short term, we will draw upon endowment monies to provide travel and development support to faculty in the tenure track and faculty desirous of promotion. We will support research and continuing education for all of our faculty and staff, whenever possible, for a knowledgeable and strong faculty and staff are a conduit to excellence in service for all of WMU’s students, faculty, and staff. I might also add that our Friends of the University Libraries organization, which is now helping to publish Gatherings, has established a development fund for staff members to improve and add skill sets.

Mobilizing ourselves under the banner of our mission, we will identify metrics that will offer us a truer picture of where our University Libraries fits among the members of the Association of College and Research Libraries and the reputable Association of Research Libraries. Comparisons to peer institutions will assist in assessing the relative size of the library staff, volumes held, number of current serials, and dollars spent on monographs and serials. Such documentation will guide our planning and underpin requests to the central administration for future funding. Commercial evaluation instruments assessing library services and patron satisfaction will be employed to give us an indication of our effectiveness in rendering essential support to the student and faculty users in areas of service, collections and technology. We, must, to paraphrase William Faulkner, “not only endure, but prevail.”

In good times and in bad, every great university should have an equally great library. No “damnit” needed!

Modern Michigan

Continued from page 1

Gatherings

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Page 3