

Dalhousie University Libraries
Sexton Design & Technology Library

EXTERNAL REVIEW

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REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Members of the Committee were asked to serve as External Reviewers to consider the service delivery unit known as the Sexton Design and Technology Library. The purpose of the review as expressed on the Libraries' website is to: advance cooperation between the Sexton Library and the rest of the University Library system to improve service to the Dalhousie University community. The intent is to further the effort to prepare the Libraries to cooperate more responsively and efficiently in the digital age, capitalizing on its strengths and thereby remaining in tune with the evolving information needs of the scholarly community.

The key to the review process was the extensive documentation that included a self study, considerable responses from the user community and library staff, and meetings with representatives of Dalhousie University community during the site visit conducted from June 2-3, 2005. The Committee wishes to convey its deep appreciation to the representatives of staff, faculty and students and library administration who met with the Committee and provided valuable input to the reviewers.

Our report is divided into three parts:

- A series of observations based on the material reviewed and on our interviews
- A series of recommendations that cover issues and challenges for the future
- A general summary addressing the "Questions to be Answered" in the "Terms of Reference"

OBSERVATIONS

General

1. The overarching comment heard from all members of the community was the concern that the reviewers would recommend that the Sexton Library be merged with the Killam Library. This concern was laid to rest as we spoke with each group. Given the distance from the Killam and the close working relationships observed with the students and faculty, as well as the professional communities, merging the Sexton would serve no useful purpose. Sexton is a professional campus and should have a professional library.
2. The reviewers noted that there were some functions that could reasonably be assumed centrally in Killam. These include technical services and support for systems. However, in order for centralization to be successful from a user perspective, a Memorandum of Agreement detailing service expectations should be laid out so that Sexton would be assured of a continuing high level of service. Centralization should not result in the loss of a librarian position in the Sexton Library.
3. It was clear to the reviewers that funding for Sexton should be improved in all areas. Recognizing the general funding difficulties facing the University, a fundraising plan should be developed that includes a development officer for the whole library system. The Sexton Library has much to offer the professional community and that community can be a source of continuing funding support.
4. The Library needs to find ways to enhance its “visibility” on the Sexton campus and to better market its services.
5. A number of staff remarked on the need for system-wide functional committees to address such important issues as collections, including access to electronic resources, public services, technical services, technology, and especially support and forward planning. Some progress has already been made with the formation of a public services committee. The appointment of an assistant university librarian for collections will address important issues in that area. Functional teams would improve communication across the system and allow all libraries to think more globally. Another area for consideration is the standard for creating records for electronic resources. Some staff remarked on the “creative” records that end up in the catalogue. This approach can cause problems with access to holdings and should be addressed across the library system.

Collections

1. Users in all the disciplines served by the Sexton Library commented on the lack of up-to-date books in many areas. They seemed generally more satisfied with the journal collections, particularly those available electronically but they did identify key titles that are not available and expressed a wish for deeper back files.

2. Conversations with faculty and graduate students revealed their view that the collection does not support advanced research, graduate work, and the post professional degree in planning. Programs are becoming more research-based and oriented to the research interests of the faculty. Consideration should be given to allocating a portion of the indirect costs of research funds to acquire collections in support of research.
3. Additional funds have been allocated for the architecture collection; however the need is so great that extraordinary efforts are needed. The Committee noted with concern the Canadian Architectural Certification Board's accreditation reports for the last several reviews, which indicate that the library is below the standard expected. There must be a very strong effort and a commitment of funds to fill the gaps in the architecture monograph collection. No comparable information from the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board reviews was provided but the Dean of Engineering indicated that library collections supporting engineering were also of concern to the CEAB.
4. There appeared to be much confusion regarding funds "removed" from the collections budget to support CRKN, i.e. that new funds allocated to build the architecture collection were taken by the transfer. This view, or attitude needs to be examined, addressed and the results made known to faculty and staff.
5. Collection assessments are required for new graduate programs and proposed new programs. However, where new programs begin "informally" assessments do not occur. The Committee saw no evidence of comprehensive quantitative collection assessments being carried out, for example, assessments that would establish the difference in collection strengths between the Sexton Library and comparator libraries serving architecture, planning, and engineering.
6. We noted that there were no approval plans for the disciplines. If funds permitted, instituting such plans would go a long way to improve the collections and free staff for other responsibilities. Shelf-ready books can be delivered in a timely fashion thus saving many hours of work. Many other universities have blanket orders with important university press books (e.g. MIT Press, Harvard U. Press, U of Toronto Press, etc.) which come catalogued and shelf-ready. .
7. Collection management and appraisals falls within the purview of the academic librarians. They alone should be responsible for all these activities, as well as the information literacy programs associated with the disciplines.
8. License agreements for electronic resources should be negotiated centrally for all libraries in order to make best use of consortium purchases. A system-wide committee of subject specialists would be a useful venue for sharing information about resources and establishing system-wide priorities among resources.
9. A very strong effort is needed to fill the gaps in the collection. There must be a

commitment from the Administration and money made available to purchase monographs to fill gaps identified through a search of publishers' catalogues for architecture, planning, and engineering titles.

10. Subscriptions for the recommended core titles in architecture and planning journals should be acquired as well as most of the supplemental titles recommended. The image collection is out-of-date and considerations should be given to purchasing a large image database.
11. Architecture and Planning Faculty suggested that the library should further develop special collections such as an archive of material on heritage buildings, personal photos, city plans, and architects' archives that would bring people to study these collections. Such a collection would become a depository and a consultation fee could be charged. It should be noted that a venture in this area will require extraordinary space and specialized staffing.
12. The loss of a comprehensive engineering standards collection was noted. This is a resource consulted by students and faculty as well as by members of the professional community. Professional groups might be willing to fund the ongoing acquisition of key standard collections.

Services

1. The Sexton Library staff offers "premier" level service to their clientele.
2. Library staff need to focus on what they do very well, working with faculty to ensure they are well integrated into the curriculum, and, can offer specialized information literacy programs at all levels. Graduate students in particular would welcome this type of programming. There appeared to be services that the library offers of which many are not aware.
3. Students expressed concerns regarding the arrangement at the circulation desk, indicating that they will stand in line to ensure that their returns are properly discharged rather than just leaving them on the desk. They decried the fact that the book drop is not open during the day. Students were also dissatisfied with the reserve collection, believing that much of what is housed there should be available in the main collection and adjacent to comfortable seating.
4. The charges for document delivery appeared to be an irritant to users. The fact that there is even a charge for borrowing materials, via Novanet, from other Dalhousie Libraries was noted. Given the cost of collecting and tracking the small charge it may be worth eliminating it all together. Other libraries have found that use of document delivery is declining with the availability of electronic resources. Therefore it would seem that concerns regarding "over running" the system may not be founded in actual data. We noted that the Relais system was not installed at Sexton and believe moving in this direction would streamline processes.

5. Students expressed frustration with the state of the collection in terms of the amount of misshelved, missing, or mutilated material.
6. Students felt that the inadequacies of the collection are aggravated by the fact that bound journals circulate for 7 days
7. Sexton has a very active information literacy program that has been compromised by the fact that two librarian positions are vacant. In 2003, the Faculty of Engineering endorsed a library proposal for integrating information literacy into the undergraduate curriculum, across the curriculum and in targeted 2nd, 3rd and 4th year courses. The plan to implement this program across the curriculum in 2004 was postponed due to staffing considerations. A similar proposal for integrating information literacy into the curricula of the Schools of Architecture and Planning was accepted in 2004. Again plans are “on hold”. Since information literacy is central to the library’s role and academic mission it is crucial that the librarian complement needed to support these programs is restored.
8. All users mentioned the poor state of the photocopy machine available to them. As well the cost per page seemed to them to be high. It could be the case that if better equipment was available, the price could be reduced, use would increase.
9. Sexton provides services to the professional community which could be expanded with a full librarian complement in place, and generate some revenue for the library. A membership or a fee for service, reflective of the value of the service, is a logical way to proceed. Often the professional communities are more than willing to pay for these quality services.
10. Regular library staff members provide excellent service to library users. However, some concern was expressed about the level of service provided on evenings and weekends. Lack of knowledge and training on the part of student assistants and language barriers were cited as difficulties.
11. Librarians offer a service to faculty that requires a great deal of time (TOCs photocopies of profile journals and sent on a regular basis to faculty). With the new Ex Libris system that service will become redundant. The ETOC service is heavily used and highly valued. Although it may be time-consuming, it is worth the effort from a user perspective. It is a model service that others would like to emulate and should be continued until the new Ex Libris system can generate current awareness listings.

Space & Facilities

1. The Committee observed that the space is inadequate to meet the needs of the students and faculty. Conversations with all groups reinforced this observation.
2. The space needs are well documented, however, solutions will required a complete overhaul of the current building. Changes to the campus may afford the opportunity for the library to gain space. That solution is clearly 5-8 years into the future. The engineering faculty will be celebrating their 100th anniversary and will be fund raising for a new building.
3. Study space, group spaces, adequate lighting, and enhanced wireless capability are but a few of the needs specifically mentioned by users and staff. A secure 24-hour study area is also desired.
4. There is space in the library that could be reallocated for student use, namely the technical services area. Transferring that function centrally would facilitate a reconfiguration of the space. A reduction of the circulation area including a reduction in the size of the reserve collection might also free some space.
5. Perhaps a task group of architecture, engineering, and planning students could take a fresh look at the present layout and produce a plan that would make better use of the existing space. Students suggested that older journal volumes could be stored offsite and that this collection space could be turned into group studies. There were also some creative suggestions about sharing adjacent computer lab space. The reference section could be turned into an information commons.
6. The existing carpet represents a safety hazard and should be replaced as expeditiously as possible.

Staffing

1. We noted that the number of professional staff appears to be lower than it should be, given the ambitious plans for service.
2. We also noted that staff do all functions and appear to wear many hats. Although a variety of duties may enhance job satisfaction, sharing the workload in this way is, in general, not an effective use of knowledge and expertise.
3. There are currently two vacant positions and the responsibilities in these positions should be reviewed and revised to focus more on line services rather than on administration.
4. Staff members in technical services are another group that could provide services to the users. Options will need to be examined.

5. Staff indicated they would welcome a libraries-wide staff meeting, perhaps twice a year, that could more fully integrate them into the Dalhousie Library System. An annual “state of the library” meeting of Sexton Library staff to ensure that all staff members were aware of priorities and plans for the year was also recommended.
6. We observed and heard about a “communication gap” between Sexton and the other libraries. This perceived gap is natural given the distance between the two campuses. Communication is a two-way street and staff in Sexton need to take every opportunity to participate in committee meeting and other gatherings. At the same time, staff in the other libraries should make an effort to travel to Sexton as appropriate for meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General

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| Recommendation #1 | That the Sexton Design and Technology Library remain in its present location. |
| Recommendation #2 | That a plan for the transfer of the technical services operations in Sexton be prepared including a Memorandum of Agreement. The plan should include consideration of the staffing required for Killam and a plan for deploying the remaining staff to other duties in Sexton. |
| Recommendation #3 | That a fundraising plan for the entire library system be developed that includes the appointment of a development officer exclusively for the libraries. |
| Recommendation #4 | That a plan be developed for the creation of a series of functional committees to address important library wide issues, including public services, technical services, collections, and technology, including systems. |

Collections

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| Recommendation #5 | That the librarians undertake a comprehensive program of collection assessment and that a series of actions be developed that would improve the quality of collections in the disciplines served by the Sexton Library. An examination of the benefits of an approval plan should be included. New funds to address deficiencies in the collection should be sought. |
| Recommendation #6 | That the confusion relating to the payments for participation in CRKN should be straightened out and the appropriate information be made known to faculty and staff by the University Librarian. |

Services

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| Recommendation #7 | That a review of the current information literacy program be undertaken with a view to expanding the program currently available to graduate students and faculty. |
| Recommendation #8 | That staff examine the current arrangements at the circulation desk in an effort to improve services to students. |

- Recommendation #9** That a library wide review of the document delivery charges be undertaken with a review to their elimination. (Charges for borrowing material held in Dalhousie Libraries should be eliminated immediately.)
- Recommendation #10** That immediate action be undertaken to improve the quality of the photocopiers available to students.
- Recommendation #11** That a formal fee for service program be created that would be available to the professions now served by the Sexton Library.

Space & Facilities

- Recommendation #12** That a plan be developed for the immediate needs of the library. The plan should include the redeployment of the space vacated by the technical services operations, and, a commitment by the University to fund necessary maintenance work.
- Recommendation #13** That a University wide committee be appointed to plan for the expansion of the Sexton Library.

Staffing

- Recommendation #14** That an evaluation of the current staff duties and responsibilities be undertaken with a view to consolidating duties and focusing responsibilities to make most effective use of staff abilities. As part of this evaluation, the current vacant librarian positions should be reassessed in light of a refocused services operation. These positions should be filled as soon as possible.
- Recommendation #15** That efforts should be made to encourage increased communication between Sexton and other libraries on campus. Consideration should be given to twice yearly all staff meetings.
- Recommendation #16** That Sexton staff be encouraged to participate in all committee work as is reasonable possible.

SUMMARY

The Sexton Design and Technology Library's primary **mandate** is the provision of expert and innovative information services to students and faculty in the Faculties of Architecture and Planning and Engineering. The provision of services to the professional community, if properly valued by that community, should lead to significant enhancement of collections and services. The Library's mission statement and its eight fundamental commitments appropriately address the needs of the primary user community.

The Sexton Design and Technology Library is also an integral part of the larger Dalhousie Library system and in an increasingly interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary world it is important that all parts of the Library system support a more global or system-wide mandate that will benefit the entire Dalhousie University academic community. A system-wide recognition that different user communities have different needs, that one size will not fit all, will ensure the success of cooperative and collaborative efforts across the system.

In terms of **resources**, the Sexton Library is in dire need of space and funds to enable the building of adequate collections. The professional staffing complement should be examined. The existing support staff complement is adequate. A detailed comparison of resources available to other North American libraries providing services to similarly composed and like-sized user communities would provide a rationale for increased resources.

The Sexton Library provides well-regarded **services** to its primary user community, despite a lack of resources. The services provided are comparable in type and quality to those provided at comparable university libraries. Innovative services include the ETOC service, the RSS feed, and the Electronic Reading Room. Great strides have been made toward fully integrating information literacy into the engineering undergraduate curriculum. A similar program should be contemplated for architecture, planning and for all graduate students and faculty members. Consideration might be given to the use of web and courseware technologies to develop and deliver alternate forms of information literacy instruction.

Public services are delivered by a complement of librarians and support **staff**. As noted above it is essential that the professional staffing complement be examined. Librarians should devote their efforts to collection development and information literacy. There is an impression of top-heaviness in terms of the number of "managers" and "coordinators" relative to the total staff size. There is a need to examine the relative benefits and balance between administration and service development and delivery.

Despite apparent good will on both sides, relationships between the Sexton Library and the other Dalhousie Libraries appear to be strained. Each library needs to recognize that the needs of their particular user communities are not the same and that there will be some legitimate variation in the types of services that are offered. At the same time, there needs to be more system-wide thinking and planning and sharing of expertise to the benefit of the entire system. Effective mechanisms for **cooperation, communication**, and collaboration, including functional teams, with clear mandates, structures, and decision-making abilities need to be established. The role of the Associate University Library for Public Services should include a “liaison” function that ensures that all parts of the system are aware of each other’s priorities, activities, and services.