

Library Committee Status Report

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This report was drafted by John McVey, and is his distillation of the topics addressed in Library Committee conversations over the course of the year.

What we have focussed on : space; library usage; special collections

What we have not focussed on : collections (traditional and digital content, development policy); “information literacy” initiatives

Our earlier emphasis on physical space led to our identifying needs for (1) an archives/special collections area; (2) increased availability of study spaces within and outside the library; and (3) a more constant and deeper conversation about learning spaces generally in the College. We have also identified some opportunities for closer work with the Gallery office, in terms of archives, special collections and an institutional repository-like “shared resources initiative.”

We’ve not really tackled usage of “intellectual resources” in our various communities of practice. How close and significant are the interactions between our faculty and our librarian and image librarian? What are financial, and what are other, restraints to our library’s potential? What kinds of information usage are found in and around our studio and non-studio classrooms? How much of this usage is not “captured” by the library? How do faculty model search and research activity in ways that our students can see and understand? Do we model these in ways that they can adopt in their own practices, rather than in emulation of ours?

We’ve discussed the idea of locating faculty within the precincts of an expanded library area; their offices would open out into library spaces. We have also discussed the idea of putting faculty to work in the library, on a rotating basis equivalent to a course release. The individual occupying this position would engage in his or her own scholarly or research projects, as well as provide bibliographic and reference support, and might also engage with students in other ways, such as brainstorming, preparation of capstone proposals, etc.

mission

We have begun but not concluded a discussion of the library’s mission, vis-à-vis the mission of the College, the evolving needs of our studio and non-studio learning communities, and its relationship with the Image Library and the Gallery.

For the record, two attempts at that draft mission are :

- 1 The Paul M. Scott Library promotes artistic and intellectual development through its collections and services created to nurture and inspire the talent, visions and aspirations of the Montserrat College of Art community.

Goals:

- 1 Support the curriculum with materials which stimulate/inspire artistic and intellectual development, critical thinking .
- 2 Teach students the skills needed to find and use information resources.
- 3 Collaborate with faculty on building or providing access to collections.

- 4 Promote the library as source of inspiration for creative work, intellectual pursuits, recreation and independent lifelong learning.
 - 5 Other???
- 2 The library is a partner in the intellectual and creative inquiry that goes on throughout the College community, on and beyond campus. It provides access to quality physical and digital resources, including books and serials, image and other databases, [and], . The library partners with the College's exhibition and visiting artist program...

where's the library

Over the course of this year, our conversations about the library have migrated away from a focus on space, to thinking about functions, e-spaces, other learning spaces within the College, and the kinds of interactions that go on in these dispersed spaces.

We are aware of the "learning commons" concept that has been adopted by college libraries. We also know that our entire college — faculty staff and students combined — is a smaller population, and a smaller facility, than some college libraries and staffs alone. We already have several computer "labs," and so question the need to locate numerous additional machines in the library.

One can't point to "the library" in quite the way one might have in the past. The library has virtual and physical dimensions. Students and faculty perform query, search and download activities from wherever they happen to be working. They read (and look) online, as well as from physical books that once were the only game in town. Monographs and serials continue to have roles (diminished, in some ways), but may have a heightened symbolic role within an institution such as ours.

The library is potentially congruent with all of the creative and critical activity that goes on at the school, whether in a studio or classroom, hallway, residence, even very remote locations.

It is a set of intellectual resources. Some of these are curated by the College; some are not. These include current and archived exhibitions, lectures, books, journals, and a variety of e-resources. Some can be accessed only physically, some only electronically, and some in both ways.

Where does exchange of information happen, and between/among whom? All over the place. We know that students write papers in the Design, Foundation/Illustration and other labs, as well as in the work area outside the Writing Lab. Do we need more distributed and oddball spaces in which writing and solitary and/or group study can happen? How does "library" study space relate to these other spaces, and to the students' perceptions of these spaces?

Many of our students are constant users of the Internet as made available to them via Google. When in need of a reference image — or even an image for reuse in a project — they tend to go directly to "image" search, without attending too much to the nature of the resource in which that image is provided. We assume that instructors model better search practices.

Gordon suggested we think about the library and gallery, and their respective collections, in terms of inputs and outputs. He referred to Armand Mattelart's *The Invention of Communication* (1996), where we find a discussion of institutions as open system(s) of inputs and outputs, in "constant interaction" with their environment. Can we think of the library and gallery in this way? What are these inputs and outputs, for the library? Institutions, and certainly the library, are porous and/or shapeshifting. (see our report of 15 October 2008)

actionable ideas

■ special collections / college archives

Special collections might include (1) college archives; (2) rare and other items requiring special care, such as artist books, prints, mechanisms; (3) artists' archives, perhaps focused on figures associated with the North Shore. Special collections might overlap with some of the materials described in the *Montserrat Shared Resources Initiative* draft developed by Cheri Coe and Leonie Bradbury.

We urge that space be designated for special collections, that would include workspace (including tables) sufficient for the processing of archival materials. It would also provide controlled storage space for materials identified as suited to special collections. We urge that a qualified archivist be found — possibly from within our own ranks — to process college archives. That role might also include identification of materials for inclusion in the archives, including AVTF and other academic planning materials, memos, oral and other histories.

This should happen immediately. The college archives are particularly important in an institution such as ours, that continues to demonstrate rapid turnover in presidents and administration generally. A well-curated archive would be a valuable resource to new leadership, and even to trustees, as they seek to understand the College, its history, and the ideas and initiatives that surface (and are forgotten) with some regularity.

Longer term, we urge that a seminar/reading room be created within or adjoining the library (and special collections), in which patrons (and even entire classes of a certain size) can use these materials in a controlled setting.

■ faculty secondments

We suggest that a program be formed by which faculty can take a course reduction in exchange for providing bibliographic and reference support in the library, develop subject bibliographies and web 2.0 tools devoted to their areas of interest (so long as relevance to user needs can be demonstrated). The semester-long positions might involve eight hours per week; the position would work with but not report to the Director of the Library.

The purpose of the program, in addition to supporting research, reference, and ideation by students, would be to encourage the sense that discovery/inquiry is a common pursuit of all of us, whether faculty, students, or librarians. Faculty research advisors might also, just by being present, model scholarly activity. The creation of the rotating position would also encourage greater alignment of studio and non-studio classroom activities with the library.

Applicants for the position would be evaluated on the basis of their bibliographic skills, subject domain knowledge; the position might be filled by instructors (including adjuncts) associated with *any* department or program.

■ cooperative arrangements

The Library currently participates in the NOBLE exchange (although not as a full member), NMRLS (The Northeast Massachusetts Regional Library System), and AICAD (the latter involving sharing and group purchase of resources including some digital content, as well as staff development and information sharing). We are currently associated with the ALA (American Library Association) and VRA (Visual Resources Association : The International Association of Image Specialists), but not with ARLIS (Art Libraries Society of North America). We have access to digital resources and archives like Ebsco and Infotrack through these kinds of systems.

Cooperative arrangements are a means to leverage limited local resources and means, particularly now when economic circumstances, and questions about library usage and budgets in higher education generally, lead to hard looks at budgets, missions, allocations, staffing, etc.

We believe that we can heighten our own involvement in some of these organizations at this time, taking advantage of our scale and values as we participate in conferences and various other partnerships. We advocate for greater institutional support for traveling to conferences and engaging with others in the visual arts library community. We believe that collaboration will increase among visual arts libraries (and image libraries) in the future, as a means of reducing redundancy and addressing budget realities. We acknowledge that collaboration is not without its headaches, but see no way around it.

Collaborations may involve institutions like PEM and the Cape Ann Museum, to name only two in our neighborhood, as well as Endicott College (with whom conversations have already begun on potentials for partnerships, in areas other than the library).

further

- learning space(s), work space(s)

Our Library Committee discussions have circled round and round several ideas of space. We believe space needs to be augmented to accommodate special collections, seminar room, housing of the collection itself, and a more varied offering of study spaces. Our ambitions for space have been tempered, somewhat, by recognition that study and learning activities that are ordinarily associated with the library, take place outside the library (in “labs,” the Illustration and Design seminar rooms, and even relatively open studio areas like the Printmaking studio in the basement of Hardie.

Moreover, we recognize that our students are querying and searching for information pretty constantly, generally via Google but using other tools as well. Whether or not they seek information in books (and the library) or not, they’re looking for it. We might agree that they don’t look far enough, look for context, step back and strategize in their searches. But they do look for images, “inspiration,” pretty regularly. And they do this constantly.

Our committee has discussed some of the implications of this search behavior. One is that “bibliographic” and “search” skills — that is, the skills we seek to engender — need to be modeled by all of us. The other is that the “library” simply isn’t going to capture all of this search behavior.

One of our main conclusions, during our long, two-year conversation, is that our College needs more conversations about (1) pedagogical practice, that (2) takes into account the various “spaces” in which learning happens at Montserrat : virtual spaces and physical spaces, structured searches in a bibliographic sense, and internet searches, computer labs, so-called “smart” classrooms, other liberal arts classrooms, studio spaces, writing center, hallways, the Design and Illustration seminar rooms.

Our conversation was quickened by *Everybody Here Comes from Somewhere*, that brave experiment that unfolded in our main gallery earlier in the Spring semester. We might draw lessons and inspiration from that minimally programmed space, in which anything could happen.

Learning space issues relate to myriad other areas, including teacher contact hours, room size, scheduling; and (more immediately) the challenges posed by a potentially larger incoming freshman class in Fall 2009. The creation of different configurations of learning spaces might also have implications for our standard six hour-per-week studio structure. [McVey wonders if constant contact with faculty encourages independence or dependency, and if it is right for every studio course.]

Where does this conversation happen?

- committees

Our Library Committee meetings have taken the form of wide-ranging conversations, sprinkled with reports on conferences and readings. They have been more like colloquia than committee meetings, all of us have benefitted and been energized by this. We have had guests from time to time, and did one joint meeting with Gallery Committee.

Library Committee conversations have crossed all manner of boundaries, to cover technological, pedagogical, archival and learning space issues. It may be that a general rethink of committee structure might result in a committee that addresses some mix of library, gallery, pedagogy and intellectual resources generally.

We would like to open our conversation to others in future.

- future work

Whether in Library or some other faculty committee, we believe that greater attention might in future be devoted to collections (including the “shared resources initiative”), with increased attention to the digital realm in which our students and faculty increasingly operate.

At least one leading academic library (specifically, Harvard) declares that “our future is digital: libraries must prepare for and promote this shift.” In what ways is this true, and not true, for libraries in visual arts institutions?