The AS&E Library Committee spent much of this year considering long-term issues. The committee met four times, and the chair met once with the Tufts Libraries Council and several times with Tisch Library Director Dorothy Meaney. Two major issues dominated the committee’s discussions: the organization and management of Tufts’ libraries, and the high costs of “Big Deal” subscription bundles offered by the major journal vendors.

Organization and Management of Tufts Libraries

Over the last few years, members of the AS&E Library Committee have become increasingly concerned that the organization of the library system at Tufts is not optimal for meeting the needs of the individual schools or the entire university. Currently, there are four “school” libraries (Tisch Library, Ginn Library, Hirsch Health Sciences Library and Webster Family Library), one “university” library (Digital Collections and Archives) and one “university” support service (Library Technology Services.) Each of the “school” libraries is funded by the appropriate school(s) with a director who reports to a dean or EAD. DCA is funded by the central administration and reports to the provost’s office. Library Technology Services is a unit of TTS.

This decentralized structure creates leadership, coordination and budget issues. The leadership issues revolve around the lack of a university librarian who could represent the interests of the library system within Tufts central administration, negotiate with outside vendors and organizations, develop a collective vision for the libraries, and enhance outside fundraising for the library system. The coordination issues arise from the lack of a strong system for reconciling different-but-related interests into coherent strategy and policy decisions. The budget issues include inconsistent levels of support from the “schools” and problems allocating payment shares for joint materials and services.

The committee began its formal review of the organization by revisiting a March 2015 consulting report on the organization of Tufts’ libraries by DeEtta Jones and Associates Consulting. The report recommended a completely centralized library system headed by a university librarian. After meeting with representatives of Tufts Libraries Council, the committee discussed an alternative proposal that would bring the four “school” libraries together under the direction of a university librarian. (Digital Collections and Archives and Library Technology Services were excluded because they are already university-level units.)

Library Committee members recognize that moving toward such a system requires buy-in by the various library administrators and library constituencies. Early consultation with Tufts Libraries Council was valuable, since the council has representatives of Tufts’ six library units plus Educational Technology Services, and currently plays an important role in coordinating cross-school interests. This semester, the four “school” library directors have formed a working group; they agree on the value of having a university librarian, and should have specific recommendations for implementation by the end of the summer. Tufts Faculty Senate has been apprised of the library organization discussions and is prepared to consider any proposal that has the support of these groups. Library Committee members continue to feel that a more centralized structure is needed and the Library Committee will continue to encourage the development of such a structure.
Collections Spending on “Big Deals”

“Big Deals” are bundles of many journals sold by a few major vendors (such as Elsevier, Springer, and Wiley.) These bundles were attractively priced several decades ago, but bundle prices have increased dramatically as mergers and acquisitions have produced a few large oligopolies that dominate elite scholarly publishing. The result is that library collection spending at research universities is disproportionately devoted to maintaining these “Big Deals.” Tisch Library now spends 90% of its collections budget for fixed cost subscriptions and half of the expenditures are for six “Big Deal” packages. Even if the Tisch Library budget returns to its level of two years ago, spending such a large share of the collections budget on “Big Deals” is unsustainable. It is clear that our collection strategy needs to be re-thought and the rethinking needs to take into account needs and usage across all four “school” libraries.

The seriousness of this problem and the difficulties in renegotiating the terms of a “Big Deal” was demonstrated by the recent decision by the University of California (UC) system to end their subscription to all Elsevier journals. UC bargained for a deal that would make future UC faculty publications in Elsevier journals openly available to anyone without being locked behind a paywall. UC and Elsevier could not come to an agreement, so UC’s only option was to accept Elsevier’s terms or walk away. Other universities and systems that have cut their “Big Deal” spending or walked away include Florida State University, national systems in Germany and Sweden, and a consortium of 250 research institutions in France.

The Library Committee is regularly briefed on collection spending and regularly consulted on collection policy. Tufts is not currently in a position where it is desirable to let our “Big Deal” contracts run out. Tufts is closely examining every aspect of our contracts and closely monitoring the changing landscape of academic publishing. One step that has been endorsed by the Library Committee is establishing a university-wide “Open Access” policy that would grant the university a non-exclusive right to deposit drafts of future peer-reviewed in the university’s institutional depository. A faculty vote to give this right to the university would relieve faculty of the need to conduct individual negotiations with publishers to retain rights to those drafts. The Tufts Libraries Council is currently working with the Faculty Senate to advance such a policy.

Brief Reports

Single Service Point Model
The Single Service Point for questions, reference help and research consultations ran more smoothly this year. Teams of Tisch staff members from Access Services and Research and Instruction worked together to identify and meet user needs and developed a new student training program for student works in Access Services. Tisch Library administrators and staff remain interested in hearing about problems and suggestions for improving the service.

Digital Design and Scholarship
The Digital Design Studio has been reorganized to expand its service offerings and to help address broader digital scholarship needs. This has been accomplished by adjusting current staff responsibilities and redefining open positions and hiring staff with new expertise.
Tisch Library Budget
Last year, it was possible to cobble together a set of one-time savings to absorb a 5.1% cut in the Tisch Library budget without obvious service and collection cuts. As mentioned in last year’s annual report, this approach is not possible for a second year of reduced funding and Tisch Library has a growing list of unmet needs for staff, equipment, space improvements, furniture replacements, and new services. The following resolution voted by last year’s Library Committee remains relevant for the 2019-2020 budget.

Members of the Library Committee ask that the Tisch Library budget … be adequate to:
- fill open positions so that library staffing is not reduced,
- cover inflation in the collection budget so that it is not necessary to reduce acquisitions in key areas,
- maintain the level of research support provided to students and faculty, and
- meet the increase in demand for library services brought about by increasing student enrollments.

Strategic Planning
The Tisch Library executive team has begun a strategic planning process to:
- research and understand the role of the library in the current context of Tufts, academic libraries and higher education;
- project the areas of need and the capacity needed to provide appropriate support;
- establish goals and priorities; and
- develop a management and planning framework that will be responsive to changes.

The “environmental scan” phase of the planning process has been completed. The next phase includes stakeholder feedback from faculty, students and administrators. Reporting and soliciting input from the Library Committee will be an early-fall agenda item.

Thanks
Service on the Library Committee is satisfying and productive because members care about Tufts libraries and are actively consulted by the Tisch Library administration and staff. We are grateful to Tisch Library Director Dorothy Meaney for making the committee a collaborative venture and to Ms. Harriet Chenkin for all her outstanding support.

Submitted on behalf of the committee,
David Garman  (AS&E Library Committee Chair for 2019 – 2020)
May 2, 2019