

SenEx Committee on Libraries
Summary of Open Meetings with KU Libraries Faculty and Staff
December 1, 2013

Open meetings were conducted on November 11th and 12th with a total of 15 participants. In addition, three individuals who were unable to attend the meetings provided input. In total, feedback was received from just over 11% of the approximately 160 FTE employed at KU Libraries.

Numerous topics and issues were identified. Four common themes emerged, each of which will be discussed in greater detail below:

1. Deprofessionalization of librarians as evidenced by the ongoing reclassification of librarians from tenure-track to unclassified professional
 2. Centralization of technology support
 3. Emphasis on digital media
 4. The KU Libraries reorganization
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1. Deprofessionalization of librarians. As noted in previous years' reports, tenure-track positions are being reclassified as unclassified professional staff. This is exacerbated further because of the current move to dissolve the University Support Staff (USS) designation, which will lump a vast array of employees under one classification system. A research university needs tenured librarians who actively and regularly engage in scholarly work. There is a concern that KU will be unable to hire highly qualified librarians.
 2. Centralization of technology support. As a result of strategic planning and efficiency efforts on campus, IT support staff funding has been removed from the Libraries' budget and transferred to central IT. There are two major impacts. First, technology staff is no longer located in the libraries. This reduces the quality and speed of the technology support available to library patrons, as well as library employees. Second, library information technology is a specialized field. Attempts to fill these positions with the new reporting line to IT instead of Libraries are unsuccessful. Excellent IT librarians are most likely to work in an environment where the reporting line is within the libraries organization.
 3. Emphasis on digital media. While there is a shared recognition of the importance of digital media and key initiatives such as Open Access, concerns were expressed about an overemphasis on digital resources to the exclusion of print media. Many disciplines continue to rely heavily on print media and many rely almost equally on both print and digital resources.
 4. The KU Libraries Reorganization. By far, the reorganization was the most discussed topic. In general, the reorganization shifted the structure from one that focused on the three primary roles of subject matter collections, instruction and reference, to a model based on the patron (i.e., faculty, student). While there is recognition that the organization is only six months along and it is the most comprehensive reorganization in recent history, there are concerns. Among the issues discussed, four major areas emerged:

1. The purpose of the reorganization is unclear – what are the intended outcomes and is there evidence these outcomes are being accomplished? What is the assessment plan?
2. The new model limits purposeful, deliberative communication among librarians. Smaller group meetings have been replaced by one large monthly meeting. Additional communication opportunities need to be developed, beyond written reports.
3. The important role of the branch libraries is not identified clearly in the new organizational structure. The role of the branch libraries needs to be identified clearly and incorporated intentionally in the new structure..
4. This type of major organizational change is stressful, but there has not been a meaningful strategy for dealing with this stress. Stress management strategies need to be provided for employees, along with safe space to discuss concerns.

Based on the input received from these open meetings, the SenEx Committee on Libraries developed the following action steps:

1. The Libraries Committee will request an overview of position reclassifications for the past three years to better understand the issue of deprofessionalization of librarians. The Dean of Libraries or her designee will present this information at the committee's first spring meeting.
2. The specialized IT needs of KU Libraries also merit further investigation by the Libraries Committee.
3. The Libraries Committee will review current practices and develop recommendations for future development of both print and digital resources.
4. Request the Dean of Libraries share plans for assessing the recent reorganization with the SenEx Libraries Committee and all KU Libraries employees by December 20, 2013.