

THE FUTURE OF THE P.H. WELSHIMER LIBRARY

A consulting report by
Scott Bennett
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March 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the invitation of Dean Mark Matson, I visited Milligan College on 28 February-2 March 2006 to consult about the P.H. Welshimer Library and its collections. I meet many faculty and some academic staff and students; I visited many campus buildings. This report on my visit focuses on four questions:

Why does the College want students to come to the Welshimer Library? (pp. 3-5). Faculty and students alike see use of the library as a means for celebrating the life of the mind and for fostering effective learning.

Does the College need to build additional library space? (pp. 5-6). The College can probably avoid building additional library space if it can reduce the footprint in the building of both the print collections and the library staff.

What might the College do in the near- and mid-term to reshape experimentally the way the Welshimer Library is used? What should the library goal be for the upcoming capital campaign? (pp. 6-12). The report describes a number of relatively low-cost experiments in the use of library space. These experiments could guide a transformation of library programs over the next few years, make the library a much more frequent and successful choice for study among students, and inform decisions regarding the library in the upcoming capital campaign.

What are the key questions for the College in managing the library collections? (pp. 12-14) I identify three such questions and argue that the existing system for allocating book funds and meeting selection responsibilities is dysfunctional. I describe vendor approval plans as a viable alternative.

This report proposes lines of inquiry more frequently than it recommends specific solutions to problems. By pursuing these inquiries, I believe the College will discover ways to create a different sense of what librarians do and where and how they work with faculty; to build a richer collaboration among the College's librarians, student success staff, and information technologists; to deepen the library's engagement with instruction; and to foster and celebrate the academic success of students. These discoveries will drive a fundamental shift in the use of library space away from shelving, and they will require a design of library space that fosters specific learning behaviors valued by the College.

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INTRODUCTION

The P.H. Welshimer Library was designed in the late 1950s. Over the more than 45 years it has serviced Milligan College, student enrollment has doubled and the collections have grown substantially. In the resulting competition for space, the collections have won. At Milligan College and at most academic libraries in the United States, space intended to bring readers and collections together has increasingly been used simply to shelve collections, with the result that readers have been driven away from their libraries.

This exodus has been hastened by the obsolescence of the Welshimer Library's mechanical systems. These systems have become unreliable in operation and probably more expensive to maintain, and they were never designed to achieve today's standards of comfort or energy efficiency. The library, a three-story structure, was also built without an elevator, making it impossible to meet current accessibility standards.

The years that saw these slow-acting perversions of library design also saw rapid and dramatic changes in information technology. These changes contributed even more powerfully to the disuse of the library building. The automation of various library functions—bibliographic searching, determining the availability of library materials, renewing materials and other circulation functions, some aspects of borrowing material from other libraries—gave readers fewer reasons to visit the library building. The explosion in the last dozen years of online information resources, whether provided “free” or through licensing agreements, has put a previously unimagined wealth of information at the finger tips of anyone with a networked computer. This revolution in information technology makes it less and less likely that readers will need or wish to visit the library building. This trend will continue and strengthen because it is responsive to the larger economy and because it gives readers many choices they never had before about when, where, and how to use information. As regards personal productivity, the virtual library has prevailed decisively over the bricks-and-mortar library.

Students, faculty, library staff, and administrators have long been deeply dissatisfied with the situation of the Welshimer Library. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has commented negatively on the library. But while it is fairly easy to see what is wrong with the library as traditionally conceived, it has been hard to see the best course of corrective action, especially given revolutionary changes in information technology and their fundamentally unsettling impact on library use.

It is in this context that Dean Mark Matson asked me to visit Milligan College on 28 February-2 March 2006 to consult about the future of the Welshimer Library. This report conveys my observations, organized around four questions:

- Why does the College want students to come to the Welshimer Library?

- Does the College need to build additional library space?
- What might the College do in the near- and mid-term to reshape experimentally the way the Welshimer Library is used? What should the library goal be for the upcoming capital campaign?
- What are the key questions for the College in managing the library collections?

I ask readers of this report to be as keenly mindful as I am of how brief my visit was and how partial an observation of the life of Milligan College was possible. Readers will no doubt find much evidence of imperfect understanding in this report. I ask readers to focus instead on whatever they may find that helps to advance their sense of what is possible and desirable for the Welshimer Library. I ask readers of this report to bring their better understanding of the Milligan community to bear on perfecting a vision of what is desired and on shaping a course of action to achieve it.

QUESTION 1: Why does Milligan College want students to come to the Welshimer Library?

There are two reasons for beginning with this question. One derives from the ongoing revolution in information technology, which puts any investment in physical library space in question.

The second, even more powerful reason relates to institutional mission and is inspired by the work of Project Kaleidoscope, which has provided vital leadership to thinking about the design of learning spaces in American colleges and universities. PKAL, as Project Kaleidoscope is known, enjoins us to ask “in what ways might the structure we are now planning become a physical expression of our vision for the future of our institution” (PKAL, nd). So we start with why we want students to come to the Welshimer Library because, most fundamentally, we need to understand the relationship between library use and the College’s vision of itself. This is, at base, a question about the kind of return we want from new investment in the library.

I tried to explore the question of mission in talking with Milligan faculty and students. I report here what I think they told me, and I urge ongoing attention to the question of mission as library planning continues.

The faculty with whom I talked wanted students to come to the library in order to:

- **Celebrate academic tradition.** Probably at work here is the wish to “arouse within the individual an awareness of indebtedness to one’s fellow human beings,” to quote the College’s mission statement. The library building may be the only *study* space on campus that can still legitimately claim this purpose, but it is a claim that continued innovation in information technology may soon nullify. The College should decide whether investing in library space is a useful and effective way to counter this nullifying power of information technology
- **Browse the non-digital collections.** The possibilities for serendipitous discovery were important to many faculty, and some expressed fear that a smaller print collection in the library would reduce the possibility for such discovery. This view is problematic given that students decidedly prefer quite different means of discovery (Oblinger, 2003, and OCLC, 2004, 2005), and it seems unresponsive to the fact that the Milligan collections will always represent only a fraction of what one might use and the consequent need to teach more systematic and effective means of discovery. At issue here are choices about

- the meaning of “sound scholarship and [the obligation] to seek it with diligence and perseverance,” to quote the College’s mission statement.
- **Take advantage of library services, especially reference service.** Faculty see library services as helping to develop a “respect and enthusiasm for sound scholarship.” The degree to which reference services, library instruction, and information literacy are seen as the same or different things, and the degree to which these activities are pursued primarily in the library or primarily in the classroom are some of the most important questions before the Milligan community. I will discuss these questions in the third section of this report. How they are answered should have a major impact on the renovation of the library.
 - **Study.** In my conversation with faculty, we took “study” to be a single activity of a self-explanatory nature—as of course it is not (*HPO*, 1999). With more time, it might have been useful to deconstruct the idea of study into a set of ten non-classroom learning behaviors drawn from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) that are pertinent to library space design (Bennett, 2006). I will return to these specific learning behaviors in the third section of this report. Here I want only to emphasize that any renovation of student study space, in the library or elsewhere on campus, should involve designs that are responsive to and actively foster these or other pertinent learning behaviors. Space design is rarely held to so exacting a discipline, and until it is we are unlikely to create learning spaces that “become a physical expression of our vision for the future of our institution.”

I had a focused conversation with only two Milligan students, and they were briefer than those I had with faculty. I asked students about their study behaviors. In deciding where to study, students value:

- **Choice among study spaces.** Study almost always involves some mix of social and academic elements, and students choose different study spaces depending on the mix of these elements they want at a given time. Exercising this choice is a way of expressing and strengthening the self-discipline required for study. Library space is seen as providing a mix that favors academic elements and self-discipline.
- **Food and beverages.** Students want access to food and beverages while studying. Such access strongly underscores the social dimension of learning. Food and beverages also help to energize study, especially late at night and in the early morning hours often preferred by students.

I do not report these conversations with faculty and students because they represent “the answer” to how the uses of library space relate to the mission of Milligan College or how the College might renovate its library so that it becomes a physical expression of the College’s vision of itself and its future. I report these conversations rather to argue that they are possible and should happen (Bennett, 2005). I urge in the strongest possible terms that the College itself undertake such conversations, especially with students, so as to learn in a systematic and disciplined manner what is needed to enable Milligan students to control the social dimensions of study and to strengthen the self-discipline that learning requires. Providing such learning spaces will both foster and reinforce successful learning, and such success may prompt students to invest more time in their studies and to study more productively. In the absence of such conversations, Milligan is all too likely to repeat the experience of many other colleges and universities, where library renovations have been motivated primarily by the operational and service priorities of the library, rather than the needs of learners. It is obviously a good thing for the library to function well, but if that is the primary value Milligan College gets from its investment in library renovation, it will have sold itself short.

QUESTION 2: Does the College need to build additional library space?

The growth of the student body at Milligan and of the library collections suggest that the obvious answer to this question is “yes,” just as do data from peer institutions among the Appalachian College Association. These colleges and universities provide, on average, 36 sq.ft. of space/student. When the Welshimer Library opened, it did better than this, providing about 39 sq.ft. of space/student. Today, it provides a meager 19 sq.ft. of space/students.¹

Working against this obvious “yes” answer are rapid and indeed revolutionary changes in information technology. To grasp this point, one need only ask whether anyone designing a library in 1991 would have anticipated all of the changes brought by information technology, and especially the World Wide Web, in just the last fifteen years.

I believe Milligan College might manage the risks now involved in making capital investments in library space by adopting a “maybe” answer to the question about additional space. This “maybe” answer must not represent an effort simply to duck uncertainty; it should instead commit Milligan College to a set of experiments that I will outline in the next section of this report. The learning that will result from these experiments should guide the College’s planning and reduce the risk of a poor return on capital investment in the library.

Before outlining the experiments, I must specify two threshold conditions that enable a “maybe” answer. They are a smaller footprint in the library for both the collections and library staff.

- **Non-digital collections.** These paper, film, and tape-based collections have grown over the years in ways that have forced readers out of the library. If the College wants readers back in the library without incurring the capital and operation costs of additional space, the collections will have to occupy less space. Less spaces does not mean no space for the collections, and it does not mean trivializing the collections.
 - Library staff believe that perhaps 20% of the monograph collection is out-of-date and no longer of much curricular value. The opportunity cost of the space occupied by these materials is probably higher than the cost of removing them from the collections. More importantly, browsing is much enhanced as a search strategy if it does not yield as much as 20% dross.
 - Move material to an off-site, high-efficiency shelving facility. Many research libraries have built such facilities, in some cases working cooperatively with one another. These facilities offer very low shelving costs for the least-used parts of a library collection. Their success depends on the identification of low-use materials, accurate bibliographic control, and prompt, frequent, and reliable delivery of material to readers. I believe Milligan College would be well served by investigating whether sister institutions, especially nearby ACA schools, face similar problems of overfull library shelves and may be willing to consider a collaborative, relatively low-cost solution to a shared problem.
 - More moveable shelving can be installed in the library. Wartburg College, for instance, moved virtually all of its print collections onto such shelving in the

¹ These calculations are based on historical and ACA library data provided to me and on an estimate, made from floor plans, that the President’s office and information technology occupy about 2,800 sq.ft. of space.

renovation of its Vogel Library (Wartburg College, nd). Moveable shelving somewhat discourages browsing, and readers have limited patience in waiting to open a aisle when the one they need is closed by another reader searching the shelves, or worse just browsing the collection.

The argument here is not that the Welshimer Library should be denuded of books, or that it should slow the acquisition of new books, or that it should forego browsing as a means of information discovery. The argument is rather that the library can function satisfactorily with fewer infrequently-used books on its open shelves. Library shelving typically occupies central campus space, but the shelves' aisles are most of the time empty or very sparsely populated. A decision to expand central campus library space for the sake of shelving is very costly in terms of both real and opportunity costs.

- **Library staff.** If one considers those parts of the first floor of the Welshimer Library behind the door labeled “Library,” staff occupy about 50% of the floor. And most of this space is devoted to office and other “back room” activities. These are the wrong priorities for the use of entry floor space and surely signal to readers that the library is more about librarians than about readers—is more about operations and services than about learning.

In opening the library for learners, it will be useful to identify what library staff activities *must* remain in the building. It is more convenient but rarely essential for technical processing to be done in the library. Some public service functions (like interlibrary loan) can be automated so as largely to eliminate the need for face-to-face transactions, while others (like circulation) that have traditionally occupied prime space can be automated and moved elsewhere in the public spaces of the library. Other functions (like reference and instruction) need to remain in prime space, even though more and more often these functions will also be done in virtual space or in campus classrooms.

The argument here is not that library staff do not need adequate, good-quality space for their operational and service responsibilities. It is rather that we should not reflexively believe this space must be in the library and must occupy prime space there. We should be mindful that faculty offices are often at some remove from their classrooms and invoke this model in asking if it might not make sense for librarian offices and work space to be outside the library. This question takes on special relevance if one believes, as I do, that college libraries will want to shift as much of their staff effort as possible toward instruction, and that this activity is most effective when tied as closely as possible to faculty and classroom spaces.

QUESTION 3: What might the College do in the near- and mid-term to reshape experimentally the way the Welshimer Library is used? What should the library goal be for the upcoming capital campaign?

One architect comments that traditional library design no longer serves us well and that a new paradigm is needed (Hartman, 2000). We will create a new paradigm when institutions like Milligan College explicitly invoke institutional mission and learning values in designing space and, faced with scarce capital resources, ask penetrating questions about library priorities.

I believe Milligan College can help create a new paradigm for library design and serve itself well by adopting an experimental approach to the renovation of the Welshimer Library.

The key elements of this approach are to regard time as an tool for learning rather than a source of uncertainty; to embolden the experimental spirit by venturing relatively small sums on furniture, paint, and carpeting rather than by betting large sums on grand, comprehensive schemes; by resolving to measure outcomes as thoughtfully and systematically as possible; and by affirming that some experiments will be failures, except as regard the opportunity they afford to learn how to do things better.

The experiments I suggest involve, in one measure or another, not just the library but also the writing faculty and the student success and information technology staffs. Some programmatic coordination is now in place between the writing faculty and library staff, but so far as I could determine there is no history at Milligan College of librarians, student success staff, and information technologists seeing that they have common instructional goals that require coordinated planning and a closely collaborative execution of those plans. After the faculty, these academic support staff surely represent the College's most significant investment in the academic success of its students. So long as these staff conceive of their work as being done in mutually isolated silos, the College is unlikely to get full value from its investment in these critically important personnel. Some of the proposed experiments that follow are really about breaking down the silos in which these staff work.²

Experiments to be undertaken immediately. A number of space design experiments can and should be undertaken during the current academic term or before the end of this summer. Each description of the experiments that follow begins with a question to be answered.

- *Lobby.* What does the College want to signal to people entering the library about the function of the building and one's experience in it? At present, the lobby exhibits archival artifacts and memorializes P.H. Welshimer. One knows one is in a library only because of the sign outside and because of the (very small) sign on one of the several lobby doors. The lobby is a design failure if the college wishes to signal that the building is about learning.

The College must decide what it wants to signal in the lobby. My suggestion is that it be used to celebrate student learning through the use of frequently changed exhibits of student work that involves close collaboration with faculty and that makes especially imaginative use of information resources. Exhibits would likely focus on the best student work being done at Milligan and, in doing so, informally set standards and aspirational targets among students. These targets would be the more powerful for students because they are set by peers. To have one's work exhibited in the library lobby could become a point of pride and a mark of academic achievement for individual students (and their parents). Exhibits should be as imaginative and engaging as possible, using a variety of presentation techniques ranging from traditional cases to digital displays.

Those entering the building should be surveyed from time to time, to determine whether the exhibits are having the desired impact on the culture of learning at Milligan.

² A number of colleges and universities have brought their libraries and information technology operations into a single, "merged," operating unit. I do not necessarily urge this outcome in urging the exploration of shared goals for instruction and joint action on those goals for the library and information technology units at Milligan College.

One does not want to sacrifice the memorial function of the lobby. Indeed, I would argue that the best way to memorialize P.H. Welshimer is to celebrate the life of the mind at Milligan College.

- *Welshimer Room.* What does the college want to signal to a person entering the building and looking into the very attractive Welshimer Room? At present, its furnishings say it is for formal, executive purposes; it does not invite student use.

The College must decide if it wants to signal that this building is about student learning. If it is, then this highly prominent room must be furnished in ways that are attractive to students and that fosters specific learning behaviors the College wishes to promote. Doing this will no doubt require the services of an interior designer who is ready to think not only about comfort and beauty (important considerations, to be sure) but also about fostering learning in ways that can be measured. A failure to do this last would be a failure to experiment.

- *Opinion survey.* What do we know that might guide experimentation? One way to begin building the needed knowledge would be for the College to ask its students and faculty to respond to a survey instrument I am developing (Bennett, nd). It asks about ten specific learning behaviors used by NSSE in constructing its benchmarks for effective education practice. The survey asks:

- (1) how important to the individual respondent is each of the ten different learning behaviors
- (2) how well does the campus provide spaces that foster each of these learning behaviors [this question is posed only if the response to the first is "important" or "very important"]
- (3) what specific campus spaces [with possible choices identified in a checklist] foster each of the learning behaviors [again, this question is posed only if the response to the second question is "adequately" or "very well"].

Responses to these questions might give Milligan College a place to begin in thinking about “what works” in the design of learning spaces. A different approach would be to give a number of students disposable cameras and ask them to take pictures of favored learning spaces, etc. (ELI, nd). Either approach constitutes only an initial inquiry, and both would need to be followed up by a thoughtful analysis of the actual spaces favored by students. I am committed to developing a methodology to do this; a good interior designer or architect might also do this.

However done, systematic inquiry of the sort described here is essential to experimentation and to the systematic learning about learning spaces that experimentation enables.

Experiments to be undertaken over a 1-3 year term. I suppose it will take 1-3 years to launch a new capital campaign and bring it to fruition. The College should continue to experiment with learning space in the library and elsewhere during this time. These experiments should aim at building a stronger program of information literacy; creating a more collaborative relationship among library, student success, and information technology staff; and investigating different ways to reduce the footprint of print material and staff in the library.

Vacated space. How will the College use the c. 2,800 sq.ft. that will become available over the next several months, as the President's office and the information technology staff leave the library building? If this space is to be used to reinforce the learning functions of the library (by, say, creating space for collaborative study), the considerations that apply to the Welshimer Room will apply to these spaces as well, allowing of course for the fact that these are much less prominent spaces.

Alternative uses might well be considered. One would be to move some library staff activities into these spaces, so as to free prime space on the entry floor for the use of readers.

Another alternative might be to redesign one of the seminar rooms on the second floor as a place where students experiencing academic difficulty could meet with their faculty mentors for counseling. This suggestion arises from the observation that students in this situation are reluctant (I am told) to go to faculty offices and that an alternative space might work better for this crucial student retention activity. What the library offers (or could be designed to offer) is space that manifestly honors learning and celebrates student success. Determining how to do this would challenge library and student success staffs to discover shared programmatic goals that can best be advanced through collaborative action.

- *Information literacy.* How might the College strengthen the instructional value of its library? Over the last year, Gary Daught has significantly strengthened bibliographic instruction at Milligan College and won new advocates among the faculty for the library's instructional role. More library staff effort needs to be directed toward these activities, which are directly supportive of the College's mission to "develop a respect and enthusiasm for sound scholarship and to seek it with diligence and perseverance."

In pursuing this goal, the College should broaden the library's current program of bibliographic instruction (concerned primarily with access to information resources) into an institutionally-based program of information literacy (implemented across the curriculum and concerned, as well, with recognizing when information is needed and developing the ability to evaluate information and use it effectively and responsibly). Such a program would necessarily deepen collaboration of the library staff not only with the faculty but also with information technology and student success staff.

Such collaboration often drives decisions about the use of library space, with many institutions developing information commons operated jointly by the library and information technologists (Commons, nd). Other institutions, including several members of the Council of Independent Colleges, are bringing parts of their student success operations into the library (Guelph, nd), as well as writing centers, faculty development offices, and other service operations charged with strengthening teaching and learning.

Milligan College may well want to consider using its library space for such purposes, but so long as key academic support staff work in self-isolating silos and so long as the informational technology staff sees itself as fulfilling primarily service rather than instructional roles, the College will not even understand what the possibilities are or be able to chart a course with regard to them. Instituting a program of information literacy would be an effective way for the College to reposition itself for thinking about the library as a learning space. And whatever the outcome as regards library space, the College can be assured the collaborative nature of an information literacy program will

have a transformative impact on the campus: it will sharpen the focus of disparate academic support staff on institutional mission, give the faculty newly effective allies for instruction, and bring new energy to bear on helping students to succeed academically.

Information literacy is well-documented in the professional literature and well-supported professionally, especially by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, nd). The Council of Independent Colleges offers workshops that have been notably successful in helping institutions develop their information literacy programs (CIC, nd).

- *Creating space.*³ To what extent can the library realign its current use of space so as to create more space for learning? Doing this by reducing the space now claimed by shelving and by library staff will be difficult. Such reductions will stir fears that the library is turning its back on the tradition of printed books, will involve trade-offs among legitimate priorities, and will take some time to assess what is possible and desirable.

As regards the collection, the library should institute a review process that removes material that no longer has much value for the College's academic programs. The library should also institute a program of periodic reviews to keep the task manageable on an ongoing basis. Such reviews are customarily neglected in college libraries in spite of the testimony we have from both students and faculty that such material actually weakens teaching and learning by inviting the use of out-of-date information.

At the same time, the College should investigate whether a set of sister institutions might wish to solve their own library over-crowding problems through a cooperatively developed high-efficiency shelving facility. There is a good professional literature and much experience with such facilities to help guide Milligan College and other institutions in deciding whether this is a good option for them (Nitecki, 2001, and Reilly, 2003).

Because high-efficiency facilities offer the lowest shelving costs and moveable, high-density shelving impose the highest costs, the College will want to make its decision about the former before deciding how much additional moveable shelving, if any, it should install in the Welshimer Library. More moveable shelving may be needed to keep the most intensively used parts of the collection on campus and, at the same time, provide adequate learning space in the library. But these calculations can best be made after deciding whether off-campus shelving will also be used.

As regards library staff, a substantial effort will be required to explore the options for still greater automation (of circulation functions, for instance) and for moving service operations (interlibrary loan and reference, for instance) more wholly into virtual space. Moreover, if the College pursues an information literacy program, success there will have a profound impact on job assignments and on the amount of time library staff spend on instructional activities outside the library building.

Acting on these possibilities will require an active exploration of possibilities with vendors, experimentation in the delivery of services, and engagement with professional

³ It was suggested that the attic might be renovated to create additional space in the Welshimer Library. I did not see the attic and have no opinion on this option, except to say that issues of structure, access, HVAC, natural light, and cost should be carefully assessed by an architect. It might be helpful to determine whether the building was originally designed with a view toward eventually occupying the attic. If not, I would guess that doing so is unlikely to be cost effective.

organizations such as EDUCAUSE and the Coalition for Networked Information, as well as with the more commonly attended meetings of library associations. This process of self-education (or professional development) will be considerably enhanced as the College's librarians, student success staff, and information technologists begin to bring their different professional cultures to bear on a richer collaboration with one another and with the faculty.

I believe the College should aim at removing from the library any service operations that can be done in virtual space. To remain in the library, service operations—whether offered by library, student success, or information technology staff, or by others—should be able to demonstrate a direct and compelling link between their presence and students' learning and academic success.

All of the possibilities for changing the existing use of library space over the coming 1-3 years will require inventive thinking, collaborative action, and experimentation. It is this experimental stance and a rigorous analysis of the outcomes of experiments that I most fundamentally recommend, rather than any particular course of action. It is impossible confidently to say whether the College should build additional library space; and that will remain so until the College explores and decides among different ways of conceiving its library program, along with the different uses of space that follow from those programmatic choices.

Planning for the long-term (i.e., 3+ years). I take “long term” to mean the likely life span of a capital campaign in which the library figures prominently. The problem is that the College needs to decide now on the scope of that campaign, even though—as I have argued—it cannot now answer with confidence such basic questions as where parts of the collections will be shelved, what functions will be conducted either in or outside of the library, which staff will have a presence in the library, or how much learning space may be needed—whether in the library or in other non-classroom campus spaces.⁴

Inaction is not an option, if for no other reason than that the College has already too much experience of it. I instead recommend a capital campaign goal that would allow the College to

- Renovate all of the mechanical systems of the Welshimer Library and verify there are no structural issues that need attention
- Ensure that the roof, exterior walls, windows, walkways and stairs are in excellent repair
- Construct an elevator serving all floors and ensure that all other ADA requirements are addressed
- Provide conventional additional shelving for as much as 50% of the existing print collection, with the understanding that this is a place-holding dollar amount for whatever course is taken to reduce the footprint of the collections in the building
- Provide for new lighting, carpeting, and painting throughout the building

⁴ I was asked to advise on library space. But my visits to other buildings suggested there is a lot of non-classroom learning space on campus that is underutilized. I saw such spaces in the residence halls, the student center, in computer laboratories, and in the commons areas of classroom buildings as well as in the library. This was so in spite of a general recognition that the campus does not provide students good choices for study space, forcing them to study in their residence rooms where it can be exceedingly difficult to control the social dimension of learning in a way that favors learning. It would be shortsighted for the College to focus only on the Welshimer Library in attending to learning space needs, especially given the likelihood that a successful redesign of the library will generate more demand for collaborative and other study space than can be met there.

- Provide ubiquitous wired and wireless network connections and electrical power
- Provide digital projection equipment and other high-end equipment likely to be useful in space conceived of as learning space
- Provide one classroom for library and other instruction
- Provide furniture for three times the current seating capacity of the library (102), with the understanding that this is a place-holding dollar amount
- Provide food service
- Provide a space that will be open for students 24 hours a day⁵
- Cover normal project costs (e.g., moving services to temporary quarters) and provide for the usual contingencies of a major capital project.

This formulation of the library in the capital campaign does not include building additional space. There is some risk that demand for first-rate learning spaces other than classrooms cannot not be satisfied in the existing library building, even if the footprints of both the collections and library staff are significantly reduced and even if the Student Center, lounges in the residence halls, and other informal campus spaces are better designed for learning. I recommend running this risk on the assumption that the upcoming capital campaign will have many other urgent priorities claiming attention. And surely the College will position itself well for some future campaign by showing a degree of success with learning spaces in the library that demands further action—even including an eventual addition to the Welshimer Library.

QUESTION 4: What are the key questions for the College in managing the library collections?

Quite aside from their claims on physical space, library collections require attention as one of the chief resources for effective teaching and learning at Milligan College. About two-thirds of the Milligan faculty responded to a survey conducted by the library by affirming that information resources available digitally are *more* than adequate or *far more* than adequate. Collections of such strength make it possible to transform teaching and learning in ways heretofore unimagined at most small liberal arts colleges.⁶ Creating a strong information literacy program at the College would be an important step toward realizing this transformational possibility.

While about 80% of the faculty judge the print-based and media collections of the Welshimer Library to be adequate or more than adequate for teaching and learning at the College, there is an undercurrent of concern about these collections that needs to be understood. In talking with faculty about the collections, I pursued the questions that follow.

Is the budget for the print collections adequate? Library survey data indicate 39% of the faculty believe the funds allocated to the collection are inadequate, but I could not identify the reasons for this belief in my conversations with faculty. This view is puzzling given that about 80% of those same faculty believe the collections are adequate or more than adequate to support

⁵ Many students study after midnight. That there are no campus spaces open to both male and female students after midnight creates a dysfunctional situation for a college where instruction is co-educational.

⁶ As one institution applying for a CIC workshop on information literacy observed, “the rapid development of federated searching, citation linking to electronic full-text, and the growth in the digitalization of print resources is *providing research-quality library resources to students and faculty at colleges where traditionally collections have been limited*” (emphasis added).

their teaching. It may be these faculty are only signaling that more spending on the collections is *always* a good thing.

The library's survey should be amplified so as to inquire why a relatively high percentage of faculty believe more should be spent on the collection. In the absence of further information, significant increments to the base budget for the collections may be hard to target for best effect.

Are collection funds allocated appropriately? The library's survey does not address this question. The library's practice is to allocate about 82% of the book funds in equal amounts to each member of the faculty and to degreed librarians. For FY2006, this means that each of these persons has \$648 to use in recommending book and media purchases, leaving \$6,500 for standing orders, \$444 for replacements, and \$6,400 for other needs that may arise during the year.

I believe this allocation is thoroughly dysfunctional. By Balkanizing the book funds, this allocation strategy insists on how *little* can be done with the available money and does nothing to encourage collaborative decision making. And while the system creates the appearance of equitable treatment, it actually creates significant inequities by ignoring the difference dependence on books and media from field to field, and by disregarding significant differences in book and media prices from discipline to discipline.

Does a reliable system for selecting materials exist? In Balkanizing the book funds, the library also Balkanizes responsibility for book selection. This commonly happens in small liberal arts colleges, but I believe the practice only amplifies what is dysfunctional about the system.

Many of the faculty with whom I spoke complained that book selection seemed "haphazard" and that it often produced "holes" in the collection. I believe this is the inescapable result of the uneven attention that faculty acknowledge giving to book selection and of the incentive created by the allocation system to focus only on the faculty person's own individual needs. And when a new faculty person brings new teaching interests to campus, or when any faculty person wants to develop a new course, there is little recourse other than competing for the \$6,400 set aside for other needs.

While it is true that some faculty are quite scrupulous in carrying out their selection responsibilities for the collections, many others are not. The fundamental problem here is that no one at the College, either faculty or librarian, feels his or her collection responsibility to be a primary responsibility that takes precedence over other responsibilities. Most selection responsibility is assigned to faculty, who surely should not regard it as a primary responsibility as compared to teaching. And the librarians who might conceivably take selection as a primary responsibility do not have the funds to make this a meaningful option.

So long as selection of print material is structurally a secondary or tertiary responsibility for faculty and librarians, collection development will continue to be "haphazard"; there will always be "holes" in the collection; and responding to new instructional initiatives will be difficult at best. No conceivable amount of spending on the library collections will change these outcomes without changes in the allocation of book funds and in the responsibility for selection.

There is an alternative to present practices that the College should explore aggressively. Many library vendors offer what are called approval plans. In essence what happens is that the vendor works with the library to establish a "profile" of collection needs that is then satisfied, within the budget limit specified, by material chosen for the library by the vendor's professionally trained selected staff. Books sent to the library may and should be reviewed for their

appropriateness, so that the profile and selection routines can be adjusted to meet better the needs of the college. In this way, librarians and faculty take on the role of program managers and abandon the role of book selectors. The library may also be able to buy additional services (e.g., cataloging and preparing material for the shelves) in conjunction with an approval plan, possibly saving in-house processing costs. Vendors can make money on these services because of the economies of scale that result from the similarities among library profiles.

The objection to approval plans is that they involve surrendering authority over the selection of individual titles. Faculty who are conscientious about their selection responsibilities are understandably hesitant to give up this control, while faculty who are not are generally indifferent to the issue. On this point of concern, it is useful to remember that as regards electronic resources, faculty and librarians have already surrendered selection control to vendors and to purchasing consortia that present “packages” of resources to the library for purchase. Small liberal arts colleges have few opportunities to select individual electronic titles. And such opportunities are evidently not needed, given the view of two-thirds of the Milligan faculty that the electronic collections are *more than* or *far more than* adequate.

Happily, it is possible to experiment with approval plans as a way of correcting what is dysfunctional in Milligan’s existing selection activities. The library could work with selected faculty or departments to put narrowly focused approval plans in place as a way of testing the operation and value of such plans.

By outsourcing book selection to a vendor, Milligan College could enable both its faculty and librarians to focus more on their mission-critical instructional activities. This shift in operation does not imply that book selection is unimportant to teaching and learning. It argues rather that faculty and academic staff are the College’s most valued (and most expensive) resource for acting on its mission, and they should be freed wherever possible to concentrate on that mission.

CONCLUSION

A number of faculty commented that the College’s willingness to bring a consultant to campus is a welcome and very positive sign of support for the library and of commitment to change.

Change is indeed the order of the day for libraries. This has been especially true since the introduction of the World Wide Web some dozen years ago. Just because we are all in some measure bound to traditional visions and habitual understandings, it is essential to challenge these blinders quite self-consciously. So the best stance in thinking about the future of the Welshimer Library is to think of it as an entirely empty building and then to ask: *what* does the College want to happen in this building and *why* does the College want that? Answers to these questions that are simply rooted in past practice should be inadmissible.

Questions about *what* and *why* should be pursued as questions involving the mission of Milligan College. I believe that in answering these questions, the College will discover ways to create a different sense of what librarians do and where and how they work with faculty; to build a richer collaboration among the College’s librarians, student success staff, and information technologists; to deepen the library’s engagement with instruction; and to foster and celebrate the academic success of students. These discoveries will drive a fundamental shift in the use of

library space away from shelving, and they will require a design of library space that fosters specific learning behaviors valued by the College.

In answering these key questions about *what* and *why*, the College will pursue a unshakable focus on student learning and thereby make the library building a physical expression its vision for its future.

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