SERVICE IN A NEW MILLENNIUM: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH

Report
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 3
  The Libraries in Context 3
  Assessing Service Quality 4

Facilities 5
  Cohen Library 5
  Archives and Special Collections 7
  Ruderman Architecture Library and Architecture Visual Resources Library 8
  Art Visual Resources Library 9
  Music Library 9
  Science/Engineering Library 9
  Center for Worker Education 10
  iMEDIA 10
  The Future 10

Collections 11
  Tables 1-15 13

Appendices
  Fig. 1. Library Square Footage
  Fig. 2. Library Seating Inventory
  Fig. 3. Electronic Classroom Floor Plan
  Fig. 4-5. New Architecture Floor Plans
  Library Strategic Plan Draft of 12/2006

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Introduction

The Libraries in Context

City College (CCNY), founded by public referendum in 1847, has always been tied to the economic health of New York City and State. This fiscal year, the implementation of a new funding initiative—the City University of New York (CUNY) Compact—has helped to improve the budget health of the CCNY Libraries along with the that of the College as a whole. In 2006, in preparation for a Middle States accreditation visit, the College revised and updated its mission statement. Like earlier versions of the mission statement, this revision stresses that the College should be a “comprehensive teaching, research, and service institution dedicated to accessibility and excellence in undergraduate and graduate education” … while “advancing knowledge through scholarly research.” Financial support for this ambitious mission is also impacted by tuition revenue collections and private fundraising.

The College is part of the CUNY system. Within this system the College is the oldest of eleven senior colleges. The system also has six community colleges, a graduate center, a law school, a school of biomedical education on the City College campus, and a newly created journalism school. The CUNY Honors College, created in 2001 with iterations at seven of the senior colleges including City College, aspires to attract the city’s best and brightest. All of these entities compete for students, funding and prestige. The University Chancellor, an alumnus of City College, has risen through the ranks in CUNY throughout his career and is extremely knowledgeable about all aspects of the system. Under his stewardship, admissions standards and graduation rates have risen system-wide.

Taking the broadest perspective, the City College Libraries, as part of a public institution of higher education, are subject to political give-and-take at both the City and State levels. While City College and the other senior colleges receive their funding from the State, CUNY Trustees are appointed by the Governor (10) and the Mayor (5). Funding of the colleges and their libraries from public coffers is dwindling as a percentage of the total budget of the institutions. The colleges are
asked to heavily supplement their operating budgets through fundraising. The City College President, when he arrived in 2001, set about returning City College to its rightful place as the flagship of the system. A recently-completed capital campaign exceeded its published goal of $150 million dollars for the college, capped by the largest single gift ever received—$26 million from alumnus Andy Grove for the School of Engineering.

The Library and the College are also much affected by national and international trends. Federal funding supports work-study aid, student financial aid, and many of the College’s sci-tech grants. International trends such as immigration directly impact our student body, and globalization of the economy influences their post-graduation job placement. Homeland security requirements put into place in the post-9/11 world have had a lasting effect on the composition of our student body and the nature and scope of the $50+ million of grant-supported research on campus.

The City College Libraries endeavor to support the College’s mission for both undergraduate and graduate education for a largely non-traditional student body, within the particularly challenging environment of trying to balance support for teaching and support for research, both in terms of resources obtained and programs supported. Our perennial question is how to leverage our limited resources across this broad spectrum of higher education needs. To our benefit, the libraries in CUNY are highly collaborative, working together with the CUNY Office of Library Services to support integrated library systems and consortial agreements for services such as binding and selected electronic information resources. The financial savings realized by doing so have enabled the City College Libraries to support the College’s mission at a higher level than in the past.

Assessing Service Quality

Attempting to determine whether we are meeting the basic needs of our users, the City College Libraries have participated in two iterations of the LibQual+ total library assessment program in the 21st Century—the first independently in Spring 2003, and the second as part of a CUNY-wide cohort in Spring 2005. This nation-wide survey designed to measure user perceptions
about library service quality gives users an opportunity to provide feedback about services, collections and physical spaces. It relies on the use of a gap analysis between the minimum acceptable level and the desired level through the user’s perception. Survey questions are general in nature, allowing users to say that library collections, for example, need improvement, but not specific enough to allow action items to be drawn from the analysis.

The ability for responders to provide comments has proven to be the most useful part of the LibQual+ process, and many respondents have taken advantage of the option to provide specific, and often detailed, examples of issues and areas where improvement is desired. The centrally-administered 2005 survey produced comments which concurred with the earlier survey in areas we continue to address – facilities and the book collections. These two categories of comments provide the overall framework for this external review.

**Facilities**

*Cohen Library*

Numerous reconfigurations of space in Cohen Library have occurred since the external review of the libraries in March 1999. The creation of the first Library electronic classroom on the 1st floor, which opened in Fall 1999, greatly improved our ability to provide information literacy instruction in an appropriate setting with 25 computers, a smartboard and seating for up to 50. With this classroom added to our demonstration classroom space on the 1st floor, we were much better able to accommodate an increasing number of New Student Seminar library sessions. The small 20-seat classroom adjacent to the demonstration classroom was rarely used, as it lacked the necessary wiring for access to the network.

In Spring 2001, the Hungry Mind Café opened in what formerly served as the microforms reading room. With the advent of large scale availability of digital content, the original purpose of the space was redundant, and the café offered both study and lounge seating for 100. It became
immediately popular with the students and even managed to accommodate small film screenings and similar activities.

2002 was the year of the new Library entrance, increasing the visibility and presence of Cohen Library in the North Academic Center rotunda. Also, our Library elevators were completely overhauled and our atrium skylight replaced.

In 2004, the Library learned that a new and modern writing center, the Rudin Academic Resource Center, would occupy space originally in the Library. The Library undertook a large-scale weeding project and relocation of the remaining volumes elsewhere on the 3rd floor to accommodate the center. With the center’s opening in Fall 2004 and the temporary relocation of the Dominican Studies Institute Library into the 20-seat teaching space on the 1st floor, space in Cohen Library became tighter.

But, at the same time, the Library also recovered space on the 5th floor which had been used for the Center for Teaching and Learning and the NASA Center since 1996. When these units vacated the space, the temporary walls were removed and the area remodeled. Shelving to accommodate the “E” and “F” classifications was constructed in this space in order to relieve collection overcrowding on the 1st floor. Study seating for 47 was added. We will add some additional shelving in that space for future collection growth during this academic year.

During the Summer of 2005, we removed the doors to most of the individual study carrels on the 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th floors of Cohen, in response to student’s requests. These open rooms are now double units, providing more needed seating. Also during the Summer of 2005 the Library converted 1,600 square feet of space in Technical Services into a ‘Reference Annex,’ moving in thousands of lesser-used but still essential reference titles in order to free up shelf space in the reference collection.

Early in 2006, the Library was informed that its electronic classroom space would be transferred to Disabled Student Services and that Hungry Mind Café space would be transferred to
the Dominican Studies Institute Library and its archives. In response, the Library chose to renovate the connected spaces on the 1st floor to create a new electronic classroom of equal capacity to the previous one, directly connected to the already-existing demonstration classroom. The Library now has two modern, fully-equipped teaching spaces. [See Fig. 3]

In Fall 2006, the Library completed a collection reorganization project to combine our split periodical collections into an integrated whole. The 34 years worth of newer volumes were moved into the main periodical sequence on the 1st floor. Additional volumes of science periodicals were integrated as well, giving the Science/Engineering Library some more growth space. The reference collection on the 2nd floor was brought out of the shadows and into proximity with the reference desk. The U.S. Serials Set of government documents also came up to the 2nd floor to space adjacent to the rest of the documents collection.

In November 2006, installation of wireless capacity on the 1st and 2nd floors was completed, with the remaining floors slated for full capacity by February 2007.

Cohen Library has always been viewed as having unlimited capacity to absorb its own growth and collection transfers from its branch libraries as well as to accommodate any other changes to its space the College administration might wish to make. Collection growth is putting Cohen near capacity now, and master plan guidance for the future is key.

**Archives and Special Collections**

Located on the 5th floor of Cohen Library, the Archives and Special Collections facility was state-of-the-art at the time of its construction at the end of the 1970s. It has compact shelving in the Archives area, a separate rare book room, a decent HVAC system, and its own security system. One element not in the original design—appropriate space to accommodate oversized documents requiring flat storage—was addressed in 1999 through the creation of an Archives Annex space adjacent to the main facility. The annex also accommodates the segment of Morris Raphael Cohen’s personal library that has been kept intact as both an example of his collecting philosophy and of the
Bliss classification system once widely used in this Library. The Library’s ongoing desire for an
exhibition gallery which could securely accommodate original objects was also addressed in the
annex project. The gallery space is used regularly for fine art, cultural and historical exhibitions, and
will eventually have improved display conditions.

In the open stack area of the 5th floor, in a niche behind the rare book room and south of
the Archives reading room wall, are the stacks which house the Russell Sage Collection, a rare
historical collection of social welfare materials. The research value of the collection is widely
acknowledged, and it could be better served if connected with Archives and Special Collections in
some physical way.

**Ruderman Architecture Library and
Architecture Visual Resources Library**

In 1999 the College began planning to move the School of Architecture, and with it the
architecture library and the visual resources library, to the “Y” Building. Architect Rafael Vinoly was
chosen as the designer for the renovation, and by March 2003 the design phase of the project was
complete. [See Fig. 4-5] Unforeseen construction and funding delays postponed the start of
construction, and the move-in date has been pushed back into 2008. The new library space of
approximately 10,000 square feet also incorporates the visual resources library and will provide 40%
more space than the current facilities combined.

Meanwhile, the Ruderman Architecture Library space on the 4th floor of Shepard Hall is a
busy place. Its information literacy offerings are taught in its loft where there are 11 computers that
also serve as the open access computer facility. Collection space is tight overall and particularly for
oversize books. Weeding of the collections occurs regularly and both upper and lower shelves of the
stack units are in full use.

The current home of the Architecture Visual Resources Library is in Shepard Hall room 303
where the public area of the facility has been improved recently with the swap of free-standing slide
cabinets for Numade ones requiring much less floor space and with the significant investment in
digital images, including the ArchiVision collection.

**Art Visual Resources Library**

This Library has made the move into digital collection development in a major way, first by
creating an in-house image database and purchasing collections such as Saskia, and then most
recently through access to ARTStor. The visual resources librarian hopes to have the main slide
facility updated to reflect the transition to a digital environment in the near future.

**Music Library**

Renovated and updated in the early 1990s, the Music Library in Shepard Hall is our most
modern and inviting space, offering ambiance along with high-tech playback equipment for multiple
recording formats. Shelf space for growth is a serious concern.

**Science/Engineering Library**

The Science/Engineering Library’s location in Marshak is utilitarian. The reading room area
was sub-divided to incorporate a small electronic classroom/lab facility several years ago, and the
current reading/study space and collection growth space are strained. The nature of the curriculum
in both Science and Engineering tends toward group work, so the Library, with funding from the
Provost, has just created a new group study room, converting a former faculty-only reading room
into a student study space with seating for 13. Construction was completed in January 2007.

Collections have been accommodated by constant weeding, construction of shelving in every
inch of space possible and periodic transfer of bound journals to Cohen Library. The advent of large
scale availability of digital content allowed the cancellation of more than two-thirds of the paper
journals coming into the Science/Engineering Library. Since there is unexcavated ground beneath
the lower level of the facility, compact shelving on that level would greatly improve capacity.
Center for Worker Education

CCNY has had a Center for Worker Education for nearly 25 years in downtown Manhattan and it currently serves about 25% of the undergraduate student body. With the support of a new dean of the school, we began providing reference services and short research workshops to the students there in Fall 2005. We have expanded services to include information literacy instruction in both group and individual settings, and have increased the number of reference hours on site.

With the Center’s move to enlarged quarters in January 2007, the Library will have a space separate from the reception area in which to work with students, and we hope to develop a ready reference collection on site as well as offering reference services full-time in the near future.

iMEDIA

iMEDIA has changed lines of reporting since 1999 and is not considered in this review.

The Future

Absent a College master plan, the Library has generally limited its own planning to areas within its control. The architecture librarian and the visual resources librarian have given significant input to the design of the new spaces they will occupy in the “Y” Building and have been full participants in that planning process.

Incremental change is our focus for other facilities. Proposed improvements include the incorporation of the Russell Sage Collection into the Archives and Special Collections facility on the 5th floor of Cohen Library. This plan involves the construction of permanent walls and a connective door, along with an internal alarm system upgrade. Further, for Cohen as a whole, there is a need for secure, 15-second delay panic bar locks on the 13 possible Library exits.

The most urgent facility plan we hope to implement is a new Science/Engineering Library reading room. The space above the current reading room is an open plaza at the north end of Marshak with an existing exterior staircase. Our desire is to build a new reading room and computer space on the plaza level, connected to the existing Library space. The new facility would provide
much more seating and study space and allow the construction of more shelving for collection growth in the current reading area.

The CUNY libraries and the Office of Library Services are having preliminary discussions regarding the need/desire for a shared off-site storage facility, and CCNY would expect to participate in the development, design and utilization of such a facility should this option prove feasible for the University.

**Collections**

CCNY’s founding pre-dates that of its current parent institution, CUNY, by more than a century. The formation of CUNY in 1961 through the inclusion of separate institutions into an administrative entity makes it the quintessential hybrid university. CUNY is a mix of senior, community and technical colleges, separate law, medical and journalism schools and one where laboratory-based and research-oriented doctoral programs are housed far from the Graduate School and University Center. Thirteen of these, including all the Engineering ones, are based on the CCNY campus along with the Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education. The Library endeavors to support the needs of all these programs, but above-average inflation in the price of library materials is a constant challenge.

We are meeting that challenge well in two collecting areas:

1. **Journals** – with the explosive growth of the availability of digital content, we now have access to more than 31,000 periodical titles, significantly more than our CUNY peers. We believe a commitment to provide access to research journals is critical to the College’s mission, and have earmarked funding to a significant degree in support of that commitment. Our 2006 research journal funding exceeds that of our CUNY sister institutions by **20%** (Baruch), **35%** (Queens), **40%** (Brooklyn) and **45%** (Hunter).
2. Government information – in the federal depository program, we have increased our percentage of materials collected from 35% to 51% in the past three years.

Collaboratively, CUNY has endeavored to maximize book collections at all the campuses through the implementation of CLICS in Fall 2006. This universal hold system, combined with a centralized delivery service, allows patrons to request a book from any CUNY library and have it delivered to the pick-up location of their choice. This program has hugely increased the demand placed on the few collections of depth in the university, including CCNY’s.

In an effort to see how our book collections compare with peer institutions, both inside and outside CUNY, CCNY subscribed to the WorldCat Collection Analysis product this year. What follows are selected comparisons from that data analysis system in four specific book collections—Biomedical Engineering, Psychology, Architecture and Chemistry.

The institutions we chose to compare our collections to are ‘peer’ in fundamental ways:

1. Hunter College (est. 1870), Brooklyn College (est. 1926), Queens College (est. 1937)—the other CUNY schools of the ‘big 4.’

2. State University of New York (SUNY) university centers—Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo and Stony Brook—chosen because the CUNY Graduate School and University Center is not directly comparable to the SUNY university centers in that its Cognitive Science, Science and Engineering doctoral programs are based on other campuses, including 13 at CCNY.

3. Great Cities’ Universities—Incorporated in 1998, the Great Cities’ Universities Coalition of 19 member institutions is the successor to an informal association of urban universities called the ‘Urban 13.’ Established in the late 1970s, the Urban 13 consisted of like-minded urban university presidents working collaboratively to advocate for the concerns of public urban universities and the cities in which they were located. CCNY is a founding member of this organization, and as may be seen in Table 25, those institutions selected for comparison from this association match CCNY’s degree offerings well.

The following tables are a visual overview of the state of the CCNY book collections, when stacked up to our academic peers.