Introduction

In September 2007, Provost Mark Nook mandated a Library self-study that would include an outside evaluation team. On September 17, 18, and 19, 2008, the outside evaluation team visited the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) to provide an external review of the Self-Study of the University Library. The visitation team included Kathy Pletcher, Associate Provost of Information Services, UW Green Bay, Larry Hardesty, recently retired University Librarian, Winona State University, and Anita Evans, Library Director, UW-La Crosse. The team members had the opportunity to meet with the entire library staff, the library faculty, the library classified staff, representatives of the classroom faculty, representatives of the students, and with the CIO. At the end of the meeting the review team met with the Library Director and Provost. These meetings confirmed the team’s initial impression of the thoroughness, inclusiveness, and seriousness of the Self-Study. As a result of individuals’ openness and candor, the team came away with a positive impression of both the Self-Study and the review process.

There are, of course, both strengths on which the UWSP Library can build to enhance its support of the mission of the institution and challenges it must confront if the UWSP Library is to achieve fully its potential.

Staffing

The visitation team finds the library staff friendly, cooperative, knowledgeable, professional and service-oriented. The library staff provides a solid foundation, as evidenced by their participation and leadership in the Self-Study and in building a stronger role for the Library in supporting the mission for the institution. Both the faculty and student groups with whom the visitation team met expressed appreciation for the quality service and hard work exhibited by library faculty and staff. Faculty members used phrases such as “amazingly helpful” in describing staff. The positive attitudes paralleled the Self-Study survey results. The long tenures of many librarians and staff members (both those currently employed and those recently retired) point to tradition at UWSP of a high level of professional and institutional knowledge.

The FTE for library faculty members, classified staff members and student employees is sufficient but needs to be realigned. Some of the staff expressed a belief that they are too few and overworked. However, the normative data from comparable institutions gathered for the Self-Study do not support the conclusion that the overall staff numbers are inadequate. There are underutilized strengths among the staff. There are also several
indicators that suggest either inefficiencies or, at least, not the best use of finite personnel resources.

The visitation team recommends some adjustments in responsibilities, within the context of existing and any new positions. For example, currently, it is not apparent to the visitation team that an individual librarian has specific responsibilities (and the expertise) for the management of electronic resources—licensing, evaluating interfaces and content, gathering data to decide on databases that could replace paper, responding to technical issues. The Media Lab needs someone with an updated set of skills to offer new services. The visitation team considers the Government Publications area overstaffed. Not more than one FTE should be required to oversee both the federal documents and Wisconsin documents collections. Furthermore, as described in more detail below, the visitation team concludes that the LR101 course takes too much librarians’ time in relation to its impact on the student body.

Clearly, librarians, as reflected in comments during the meeting with library faculty members and from a review of the University Library Faculty Personnel Policies and Procedures, are dedicated to a teaching mission. Librarians as teachers is a component evaluated with any new library faculty member hire. During the interview with classroom faculty members, several observed that the quality of teaching has improved over the last 15 years. Despite this emphasis on teaching, there is no librarian whose primary function is Information Literacy Instruction with responsibility for its assessment. The visitation team believes a librarian with this responsibility could track the developments in the General Education program and the development of learning objectives, and take a proactive role to insure that the library literacy elements are reflected. Therefore, the visitation team recommends the creation of such a position, as existing positions are evaluated.

One concern expressed in the Self-Study and by groups and individuals with whom the visitation team met related to marketing, although the students and classroom faculty in the groups the team met with had some difficulty in providing specific suggestions on how to more effectively market the Library. The library faculty has a liaison program to academic departments, but its effectiveness appears to vary from librarian to librarian. It is also not clear to the visitation team if library faculty members are evaluated on their effectiveness as a liaison to academic departments. Currently no staff position is designated for marketing or outreach services. For increased effectiveness, as existing positions are redefined, the visitation team recommends reviewing and defining marketing and outreach services and assigning responsibilities in these areas. For example, outreach should go beyond simply marketing, and the librarian should develop services that extend outside of the Library walls and reach users wherever they may be.

In evaluating the best use of staff resources, the visitation team recommends the Library conduct a workload analysis to determine both bottlenecks and capacities to take on additional workload. A part of this analysis, of course, should include reducing unnecessary work and inequalities among responsibilities, which means establishing priorities based on shared objectives and goals and taking into account finite resources.
For example, the visitation team notes there may be an imbalance in how workload is distributed among library faculty members for class instruction and evening/weekend reference desk assignments. Each task should be reviewed in terms of how it benefits students and faculty members. What tasks can be eliminated or should be done differently? Can automation be used to reduce workload and/or improve accuracy and service delivery? What does the future hold? Such consideration may mean deferring the replacement of permanent positions until the staffing analysis and strategic planning process are completed. Temporary staffing may be necessary to ensure the efficiency of needed continued operations.

As faculty, most of the librarians have nine-month contracts and summer employment is optional. This situation results in some inefficiencies and inequities in responsibilities and a lack of appropriate supervision. Some classified staff members, apparently, are left largely unsupervised during the summers. In this situation momentum can be lost for typical summer projects, such as culling the collections, best done in times when the Library has fewer demands on it from its users.

While some library faculty members stated they would not be at UWSP if summer employment flexibility were not available, this flexibility must be balanced and used judiciously to insure that necessary library operations are not adversely impacted during the summer months to the detriment of the Library’s and UWSP’s missions. The visitation team recognizes that in some instances, the tenure demands on new library faculty members are such that flexibility is needed to finish a second masters (as required), do research, and write for publication. The UWSP library faculty and administration need to ask, “Is the second master’s really necessary for the librarians to support appropriately the missions of the Library and the institution? Professionally, the MLS is considered the terminal degree. The requirement of a second masters reduces both the size of search pools and puts additional stress on newly hired librarians. Anyone offering solutions, of course, must consider carefully local culture and sensitivities to avoid undesirable ramifications.

As with most organizations, internal communication could be improved. Both librarians and classified staff expressed an interest in knowing about any planned facility changes, particularly those that affected their areas. Also, several library staff members believed it helpful to know more about the budget. Most, however, recognized that Self-Study report data provided a positive direction in better communications about the budget.

Facility and Space Utilization

The Learning Resource Center is a large, impressive building. With its 133,000 useable square feet, the visitation team believes the space is adequate for library and selective other functions. The question is whether or not the space is being used most effectively, particularly looking at “prime real estate” in prominent or attractive locations? Several questions need to be answered. Could the Library provide better services if it had use of some of the spaces now occupied by other non-library offices and functions? Are some
of the non-library offices and functions supportive of or impediments to better library services? Can some library functions be consolidated to use less space and are some overly crowded?

One characteristic of the Learning Resource Center that immediately caught the attention of the visitation team is the number of service points, which, despite the vertical orientation of the library, seems excessive. While some of the staff members explained that the service points provide better service and student actually could check out items at several locations, multiple service desks are often confusing and impede the ease of “one stop shopping” for library users, which should be the highest priority. In addition, multiple service desks are staff intensive. The consolidation of service points to high demand areas would allow the reallocation of staff resources to alleviate the stress voiced by some staff, the provision of better services to the library users, and the more effective use of library space. In addition, the library staff should consider moving processing operations out of service points and into a central processing operation. Therefore, the visitation team strongly encourages the library staff to analyze use trends and re-examine the need for multiple service points.

University libraries often house some selective operations that are “related university services” which complement the mission of the Library and better serve student needs by their proximity to the Library. The placement of such other services should be strategic as to not diminish the functions and space requirements of the Library. For example, in recently years writing centers have become more frequently housed in the Library, as the two organizations (writing centers and libraries) often develop a highly effective symbiotic relationship in supporting an institution’s writing requirements.

Nevertheless, multiple non-library functions add complexity to library buildings through variances in cultures; hours; procedures; security (numerous people having keys to building and with possible access to the building at all hours); traffic flow problems with restricted areas, etc. Libraries often find themselves incorporating this information into building tours, building directories, hours lists, etc., adding workload to staff and making the space more complicated for users. In addition, other services in the building can reduce the needed flexibility of libraries in offering important services to their users.

Careful consideration should be made of the “fit” of other areas housed in the library building.

- Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education (including the Environmental Education Resources Library) and with affiliation to the College of Natural Resources.
- Instructional Technology (IT) functions on multiple floors.
- Museum of Natural History affiliated with the College of Letters & Science.
- Mary K. Kroft Tutoring-Learning Center.
- Wisconsin Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies
- Telephone Office
- Other offices such as Patricia Ploetz, Center for Academic Excellence and Student Engagement
• Food for Thought Café

Is the placement of these units in the library building “marriages of convenience or compatibility?” In the case of the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education, Wisconsin Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, the Telephone Office and the Museum of Natural History, it is not apparent to the visitation team that they enhance library services to users—nor even have to be in the Library.

On the other hand, with some careful planning, the possible relocation and/or expansion of student related services, such as the Tutoring-Learning Center and the Center for Academic Excellence and Student Engagement, there could be some positive synergies with the Library resulting in better services to the students. The Library Café has been a positive recent addition. The space, however, may be too generous and some consideration should be given to reallocating some of the space to other library functions.

In addition, IT is very scattered and a consolidation of its services and offices also would offer some important opportunities for students and faculty. For example, relocating the IT Help Desk to a more accessible and visible location would benefit students and faculty, while demonstrating a collaborative relationship between the Library and the IT department. As a note of caution, to achieve the best synergies the efforts to collaborate and cooperate must be intentional. Just putting people in close proximity with each other and expecting positive results may not achieve desired effect.

The “Ideas” room provided the visitation team’s with its first impressions of the building. This is a fine example of rethinking library space for collaborative learning and integrating learning technologies using flexible furniture—a good collaborative effort with IT staff. Recent changes as outlined in the Self-Study and “Library renovations offer new opportunities” (The Pointer v. 53, #2, Sept. 18, 2008) represent major improvements to library spaces. The library staff involved students in helping to select chairs, and the library staff should continue to involve students in planning new services—soliciting their ideas for redesigned learning areas within the Library. The reference area has great potential for expansion of 21st century library learning spaces along the model of a learning commons.

Also, classroom faculty members told the visitation team that they appreciated the opportunity to use library spaces for events, such as student organization book sales in the lobby area. The size of the lobby area lends itself to public events which may further enhance the role of the Library in the intellectual life of UWSP.

Some library areas do not have adequate space. For example, the university archives/ARC area seems cramped without adequate areas to accommodate both users and materials processing. Since users are essentially in the work area of the archives staff, there is probably not adequate security for the collection. In a less practical sense, but also very important, the public part of the archives should be a show area with attractive furniture, displays, etc. to provide the appropriate ambiance for the users. A cursory review of the area suggests the possibility of building out beyond the current
walls. Of course, further study is needed to determine the impact on the function of the building and architectural constraints and possibilities.

Also, ideally the Special Collections materials could be better integrated with the university archives/ARC area. Disbursement of collections in multiple locations within the library often confuses library users. In addition, currently these collections are not particularly well serviced. The several special collections (including the Kennedy Assassination collection and the Native American collection) appear to be unusual collections of materials not closely related to the mission of the institution. Before these collections are moved or integrated into other collections, they should be evaluated for retention.

While not an unattractive building (and probably structurally sound), the building is long overdue for major renovations to reflect changes in library functions and needs and for cosmetic changes to bring the Library aesthetics and atmosphere from the 1970s to the 21st century. As noted in the Self-Study, out-dated furniture and worn carpeting need replacement and signage improved. Something must be done about the compact shelving units that not only do not operate correctly, but also pose a safety hazard to users. The visitation team readily identified several areas of needed change--and even the students noted several possible areas of improvement, such as putting covers of DVDs and videos in a public area for library users to browse; having lockers available for students; purchasing bean bag chairs.

Library staff members, who work in the building daily, are aware of most of the needs. Various individuals interviewed mentioned such things as new carpeting, a dedicated library instruction classroom, more study space by windows, more isolated nooks and crannies (such as in the Student Center), etc. While there is no shortage of locally-generated good ideas, there is a need for a comprehensive review. Out of economic necessity, changes now are incremental and piecemeal. With a more comprehensive approach, however, the Library could become a focal point for the repositioning of the mission of the institution.

Therefore, the visitation team recommends the University contract with an architect or librarian who specializes in library design to conduct a space utilization study. The consultant should assess how space is currently used and make recommendations for changes that will make the most effective and efficient use of the space. The consultant should consider such factors as: office workflow, patron traffic patterns, stack arrangement, location and redundancy of service desks, etc. The consultant should examine non-library functions that are currently located in the building. In particular, the natural history museum’s location on the first floor of the Library should be reviewed. For better results, the staff may want to use charrette process, which allows staff to examine how functions are spatially related and to plan spaces accordingly.
Library Programs and Services

The Self-Study points to the Library’s focus on service: “The UWSP Library staff is proud of the Library’s long tradition of service.” The testimonies given in the various constituent groups confirmed this dedication to the visitation team. The classroom faculty members interviewed valued library instruction and noted the improvement in the quality of presentations. A high percentage of the students reported having instruction in the use of the Library at the lower level, but much less so at the upper level as they need instruction specifically related to their major field of study.

Therefore, while the librarians emphasize their teaching role, there is a need to re-examine the library instruction offered in relation to available resources (including human resources) and to the library’s and institution’s missions. The visitation team recognizes that LR101 is a course that is valued by many of the students who take it and these students often advertise its value to other students. Also, the course has an appeal for the librarian instructors: working with small groups of largely well-motivated students, pursing topics in relative depth, and getting to set the curriculum without having to negotiate time and emphasis with a classroom faculty member. Nevertheless, the visitation team’s concern is that the number of students enrolled in the course annually (80-145) does not warrant the intensive library faculty time devoted to it. The Self-Study did a good job identifying some inherent weaknesses of such courses: they are very time consuming to keep up; students sometime take the class simply because they want a one-credit course; and students often have difficulty integrating what they learn into other coursework (although the library faculty members who taught the course did indicate that they strove to make it immediately relevant to other discipline classes student are taking).

The visitation team’s recommendation for eliminating LR101 is not the result of either a lack of quality of instruction or a lack the dedication of the library faculty members involved in teaching it. It results from the visitation team’s recognition that the time involved in teaching it both could be reallocated to help alleviate burnout among the library faculty members and redirected to initiatives that would have a broader impact on students. Such initiatives could include increasing library instruction to upper class or graduate students, working to make information literacy instruction a requirement for English 150, and offering new distance education initiatives. Some library faculty members noted the increasing workload involved in library instruction, and, as stated earlier, the visitation team received the impression that the workload may not be equitably distributed among the library faculty members. The recommendation also results from an awareness of the anticipated growth in the student body in coming years and the increasing number of students needing library instruction, as already reflected in the library instruction statistics. Course integrated instruction, as compared with a separate course, can provide a more agile (and arguably more effective) response to the increased need for library instruction. In addition, course integrated instruction provides library faculty members more opportunity to collaborate and cooperate with classroom faculty members.
In summary, considering the concerns about workload, the questions about the efficiency of LR101 and how it detracts from the more important broader effort, the visitation team recommends the suspension of offering LR 101 for a few years to determine the positive impact of shifting staff resources to the general information literacy program and related efforts.

With the retirement of the Media Lab staff member, the Library has an opportunity to re-examine the services offered, their current use, and how the staffing and space of that area support the priorities of the Library. The Media Lab appears to offer largely outdated services and many of its users are not part of the university community. The visitation team concludes it is difficult to justify the Media Lab’s continuation in its present form. Nevertheless, with an update of its services, particularly offering computer-based media services and hands-on production (webpage design, video editing, and services as noted in the Self-Study) opportunities directly to students, it could play an important role on campus. Such changes would not only involve employing staff who have the skills and inclinations to provide the needed services, but also close collaboration and cooperation both with IT and academic departments who would encourage their students to take advantage of such services. The Library might consider, if the entire operation is not maintained as a separate unit in the Library, moving some of its functions to other areas. For example, this service could be combined with IT’s electronic media services to provide better support for instructional technology across campus.

The Library’s hours are comparable with similar comprehensive institutions, and the visitation team sees no need to increase hours. However, some students lamented that extended hours were not available except in the computer lab. The visitation team does not have a recommendation in this area.

Library Collections

Although a high percentage of classroom faculty members in the survey indicated satisfaction with services and help, a considerable percentage expressed dissatisfaction with library resources. Responding to the statement, “My department’s annual allocation for purchase of library materials is satisfactory,” forty-three percent responded that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Both classroom faculty and students praised the UB service, but the disparate number of UB materials lent and borrowed (for 2006/07 1827 loans to 4106 borrows) also suggests that more resources could be directed to collections. Also, the Library should review its collections for currency and coverage. The Self-Study noted that weeding has not been part of the library culture. This results in a cluttered collection that looks out of date and, as a result, may discourage use. Unneeded collections also exert unnecessary pressures on space: are there duplicate collections such as the ERIC microfiche that can be eliminated in one location?

The Government Publications collection is at a 75% depository selection level, which is high compared to similar institutions. The visitation team recommends a review of the
current accession list of government publications, cancellations to reduce the depository level, and a major weeding effort undertaken to eliminate little used and dated materials that are not required by virtue of depository status. Whenever possible the electronic version of titles should be preferred over print format in order to expand availability of the document resources and to reduce the space needed by the print format. The Government Publications Department has functioned almost as a separate library. Therefore, the visitation team also recommends that the Library carefully examine if government documents services, processing, and collections can be further integrated into the other functions of the Library.

Students expressed the desire to have access to the video/DVD collection: information on the packaging cannot be browsed since it is a closed stacks collection. This is a valid concern and may be readily addressed through an arrangement whereby the packaging/cases are shelved in a public area and the DVD and videos, if security is a concern, are behind the desk.

Governance and Decision-making: The Role of the Library Director

The Library Director at UWSP appears to have less formal authority than the visitation team members have experienced or generally observed elsewhere. While library directors generally work through persuasion and positive reinforcement, the library director is the single individual held responsible by the administration for the direction of the library. The library director has the responsibility for providing leadership to the library, and, to successfully carry out this responsibility, the library director needs the appropriate authority. The library director clearly needs hiring, evaluation, and termination authority, all within the usual processes and tradition of faculty governance at UWSP. The team does recognize a role of library department members in peer personnel processes. The separation of authority from responsibility, as it appears with the Library Director at UWSP in some instances, especially personnel matters, violates good management principles and impedes the effectiveness of the library in serving the mission of the institution.

Currently there is no formal classroom faculty advisory group. The Library Director and others mentioned the importance of such a group, which can serve as a useful discussion/sounding board. The composition of the committee is usually reflective of the college structure. For example, some universities have a Library Committee which is a formal committee of the Faculty Senate, with the Library Director serving as an ex officio member. Members, of course, do not speak for the entire classroom faculty, but they bring an important perspective to the table. The visitation team recommends that the Library seek to establish such a formal group. While establishing formal group should be the first priority, the Library Director could accomplish some of intended purposes through informal methods, such as hosting brown bag lunches for influential faculty members either campus-wide or by department/division, and taking newly elected student leaders out to lunch to gain insights to any of library-related concerns.
Public Relations and Outreach

Classroom faculty members in the group with whom the visitation team met told the team that they appreciated having the opportunity to use library space for special programs and projects, such as a book sale in the lobby for a student fundraiser. The lobby space and the Food for Thought café offer opportunities for special programming. Again, such uses can serve as an entrée to facilitate the Library becoming more central to the intellectual life of the institution.

Still, there remains some ambiguity regarding library services. For example, students in the group with whom the visitation team met expressed uncertainty regarding the purpose of the “Ideas” room—some thought it was a classroom. They articulated a strong interest in knowing more about what the Library offered. When the visitation team inquired about the student newspaper as a vehicle to disseminate information about the library, the students expressed strong doubts about its effectiveness. Some students, however, suggested that more information be given to classroom faculty to relay to students in classes.

The video orientation to library building could be made more effective as an introduction to the Library. For example, it starts with the basement and gives prominence to services other than library services, e.g. Telephone Services. This approach dilutes the Library’s distinctiveness and the identification of the services it uniquely provides. The video also needs updating to highlight new study spaces and services. The library staff needs to determine clearly what message the video tour is intended to convey and to revise it to convey that message. The screen recently mounted by the Circulation Desk is an important improvement in raising user awareness of library events, etc.

From the description of the workload of librarian liaisons, the visitation team observes that clearly not all the librarians have adequate time to devote to individual departments regarding collection development, library instruction, and other communications. Adjustments in staff workload in other areas would open up time for more liaison and other outreach activities, including short presentations at department or college meetings. More time could be spent ensuring the Library is represented at strategic times through the school year at various events and programs. For example, if there is an information fair for campus residence hall directors, is the Library represented at that event? Apart from formal groups, there are “fun” activities to get feedback on library services, and sometimes they can be done at relatively modest expenditures of either funds or staff time. For example, at the University of Rochester, the Library gave students disposable cameras and asked them to take photos of what they liked best and least about the Library.
Budget

Overall, the library budget seems comparable to similar institutions, although historically it has been less centralized than at similar institutions. Obviously, the Library Director, with her staff, has done an exceptional job of reviewing the budget over the last few years and in organizing the budget information to reflect a clear and accurate statement of expenditures. The budget should be more centralized so resources can be allocated more effectively to support Library and the UWSP priorities.

The base funding for collections and access declined in FY04 by $91,022, although this has been mitigated by one-time additional funding. This is especially problematic in that the inflationary rate for materials often exceeds 8% per year. The $100,000 provided by the Provost showed excellent support from his office. The Library Director indicated at least $35,000 of the $100,000 from the Provost will go to collections/access in the first year. In addition, in the constituency sessions, the visitation team heard the perception that the allocation to support periodicals in some areas is inequitable. As stated earlier, a considerable percentage of classroom faculty members surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with the collections budget.

Summary and Further Recommendations

Overall, the Self-Study accurately reflects the Library. The Self-Study obviously served as a very positive process for the Library. It had broad and committed participation and it gave the entire library staff an opportunity to work together, often with those outside their units. This participation should continue with the implementation of the strategic planning process recommended by the visitation team.

The Library should engage in a strategic planning process without delay so as not to lose the momentum generated by the Self-Study. The Library has already completed an important initial component in a strategic planning process through its S.W.O.T analysis. There are other components to a strategic plan. For example, the visitation team did not see in the Self-Study (and this is understandable) what is typically called an environmental scan. Environmental scan models are available from the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and from other academic libraries. Typically they examine recent and projected directions of academic libraries, e.g. impact of technology, availability of personnel (impact of retirements and recruitment); directions of the institution (e.g. new programs, waning programs, mission of the institution); and, particularly important for a library serving a state institution, local and state resources (projected student enrollment, projected increased or decreases in state funding, availability of local support).

Beyond the environmental scan, the next steps in a strategic planning process involve the development of a vision and strategic directions that will guide decision-making over the next three to five years. Once the Library establishes the strategic directions (involving
members of appropriate constituency/stakeholder groups), the Library should develop an action plan for the next two years that will help them move forward in a positive direction. The Library probably would find it highly beneficial to use an outside facilitator to assist in the strategic planning process. The facilitator can assist the Library Director in providing an outside perspective in determining the process and those who need to be involved.

Communications and participation are important in each step of the strategic planning process and its implementation. The visitation team recommends that the following constituencies and stakeholders should be involved in the planning process: library faculty, academic and classified staff, selected student employees, student library users both undergraduate and graduate, faculty from a variety of disciplines and rank, administrators and community members. The strategic plan and action plan should be disseminated widely on campus, including publishing the plan on the Library’s web site—with opportunities for campus constituencies to respond, perhaps via a blog. Progress on the action plan should be assessed and reported on each semester. Beyond these salient points, the visitation team cannot outline in detail the strategic planning process in this document.

The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Library is at a crossroads, and the Self-Study and its follow up offers an important opportunity to more fully realize its potential in offering the services and resources of an academic library of the 21st century in step with the UWSP Chancellor’s 2015 vision. The visitation team believes, for the most part, the answers to the challenges are within the library staff. They know what their mission is, what challenges they face, and they are now presented with an opportunity to step up and address them for the betterment of all.