

April 27, 2007

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Dear Professor Mirotznik:

We submit this report in response to your request for an evaluation of the Brooklyn College (BC) Library. You asked us for an assessment of the quality of programs; the adequacy of the Library's existing personnel, facilities, and other resources to fulfill its mission; how well the Library serves the college's students; the effectiveness of the leadership of the Library; and the state of faculty morale. We were *mindful* that you recognized the need for additional resources (don't all our libraries?) but that you would welcome our recommendations on ways in which the Library can achieve excellence without an infusion of substantial new resources.

The academic research library is comprised of: collections, services, staff, facilities, information technology, infrastructure support, etc. We have organized our report into these categories. We conclude with some overarching comments and recommendations that go beyond the Library itself.

Overall, we conclude that the Library succeeds in its mission to support the students and faculty of the College. This is based not only upon the widely recognized standard of academic library assessment—the LIBQual + survey—but also on our meetings with students, faculty members, and administrators. Library collections--in both print and electronic formats--are adequate for a liberal arts college. A talented and manifestly dedicated staff provides always responsive and often innovative user services. Facilities both in the Library and the Information Commons would be the envy of most academic institutions. . We believe that the morale of the library faculty and staff is high and that the teaching faculty and student body hold the Library in high regard. (We should note that, having conducted a number of evaluation visits we have learned to spot and therefore are not overly swayed by cheerleading ringers). One theme we experienced throughout our visit was the uniform satisfaction with the leadership of Barbra Higginbotham over library and academic information technology services of the College. A comparison of the Library's situation as described in the 1994 external report with the Library of 2007 makes it apparent what the leadership advocacy of her administration and the concomitant support from central administrators have meant to the Library and the College. With some important qualifiers, we think the Library is well positioned to satisfy the increasing demands of an ambitious strategic plan by the college. It is also ready to respond creatively to an increasingly technology-sawy student body whose needs and expectations occasionally exceed the resources of any individual institution.

Collections

Although an in-depth analysis of the Library's collections exceeds the limits of our brief visit, a cursory examination of the Library's catalog and electronic access offerings, along with the judgment of the librarians and faculty, suggest that the collections are generally good for undergraduate instruction and serviceable for some Master's level graduate programs. Inter-library

lending provides good service according to the students—an important help in substituting for gaps in the collections. To BC's credit, we believe, the Library has continued to acquire monographs despite strong pressure to maintain and enhance journal holdings; undergraduates are especially well served by the balance in formats. Many academic libraries, larger and smaller, have not supported monographs, resulting in increasingly unbalanced collections. **This** imbalance has evidently occurred at other CUNY colleges with negative results for BC's library—it has become a major net-lender of monographs. This is exacerbated by BC's early alphabetical position on the lending queue. To address this issue, we recommend that the CUNY library systems office implement software to provide lending load-leveling among the colleges – this problem has been addressed effectively by other academic library consortia.

The LibQual + survey showed that 72% of the faculty are satisfied with the collections. What does that mean? It is not altogether clear to these evaluators. We suggest that this finding be compared to findings at peer and aspirant institutions. While our initial impression is that it is positive, we note that it also indicates that more than a quarter of the faculty are dissatisfied. Who are these dissatisfied faculty members? If they are the junior **and/or** the most productive faculty who are the college's future, there is cause for concern. We were advised that BC's tenure-granting rate is a high 98%; if that rate were to fall, faculty members would become more demanding and less satisfied.

We congratulate BC on being the **only** CUNY library with a preservation unit. With support from CUNY this unit could perform consortium-wide duties, space permitting. At the very least, the expertise of its staff could be shared.

Services

We found the library faculty and staff to be very service-oriented and the students and instructional faculty satisfied with library services. Especially effective are the innovative "Assignments that **work**" and the scavenger hunt on the Library homepage. Information literacy instructional sessions are generally done as part of English 1 and 2 as well as a separate library research course. Librarians have long recognized that information literacy efforts are most effective when introduced at the point of need in a research assignment. Therefore, consideration should be given to working more closely with the instructional faculty to engage the librarians in the research assignment at the syllabus level of appropriate courses. In its annual report the College declared that it wishes to incorporate information literacy and critical thinking skills into the **curriculum**. This worthy goal, like promotion of information technology-enhanced instruction, needs to be built from the ground up. We recommend that the Library liaisons to the academic departments identify potential "champions" in those departments with whom they can team up to develop coursework and assignments that require and promote information literacy. Their success can be contagious throughout the campus. Our experience suggests that the development of alternative instructional delivery systems can be time-consuming and that in order to build the requisite critical mass of faculty "champions" incentives, such as reduction of course load, may prove useful. Eighty percent of the students reported not knowing how to use the library despite numerous instructional sessions by librarians. More effective communication of those offerings should be developed. Faculty members are asked to assess the quality of library instructional sessions but students are not asked. We recommend that ways be explored to seek student feed-back as well.

Students reported to us perceptions of widespread dissatisfaction with the number of hours the Library is open. Since classes begin at 8:00 am it would be helpful to open the Library at 7.45 am, at least

during the days of the week with most demand. The same applies to evening classes – keeping the Library open for a reasonable period of time after classes end. While this will require additional resources, we believe there will be good return on investment, even if few or no staff-mediated services are offered. Library administration has developed a plan to address this issue, and we recommend that the College commit funding for it.

The recent resolution of the **EZProxy** server situation has had the intended results, but we question why it took so long to resolve so vexing a problem for students and faculty alike.

We note an unusually large disparity between items loaned and items borrowed via inter-library lending. We believe that improvement in the document delivery area (specifically, provision for desktop delivery for journal articles) would yield good results. Readily available delivery of materials not held at **BC** is especially important in light of the relatively modest acquisitions budget, its unevenness **from** year to year and increased emphasis upon graduate programs.

Two services widely offered at other academic libraries should be available at BC. Federated searching can enhance the speed and effectiveness of database searches. This should be a high agenda item for **CUNY** library directors **as** a potential collaborative service provided at the system level. Electronic reserves should be available to students. We note with concern that only 84 faculty members offer reserve readings in their courses. This is quite low for the number of BC faculty and we predict that more would offer this valuable component if course reading materials were readily available to their students electronically. We also recommend that instructors included a link to the library on their online syllabi.

Along with library hours, the subject of most student complaints that **surfaced** was equipment. Printer and copier breakdowns appear to be chronic, and computer workstation maintenance appears to be an occasional issue as well. One student observed that many of his classmates could not even spend their “**free**” copies because of faulty equipment. More broadly available computers with applications software should be considered in order for students to have “one-stop shopping,” beginning with the research and ending with the finished assignment.

Many academic libraries now offer laptop computer loan programs. These are extremely popular with students. We anticipate that such a program would be especially popular at BC where students may not want to bring their own **laptops** on public transit **and/or** where a significant number of students are of modest means.

Staffing

We commend the Library administration for effective deployment of support staff. Such utilization is especially important in a civil-service and bargaining unit environment in which flexibility in staff utilization is often difficult. Staffing levels seem adequate with the exception of the two professional positions requested in the Library and in AIT. These positions are key, we believe, if those units are expected to deliver requisite services as BC strengthens its commitment to new coursework delivery systems.

We saw no evidence of the “us vs. them” tension between library faculty and support staff noted in the 1994 self-study. On the contrary, we found an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation of others’ contributions – an essential ingredient for effective team-work in a professional organization. We believe that overall morale in the library and academic information technology is high.

Recruitment and retention of talented librarians are critical to the Library's future. The Library (and perhaps the College) should implement a formal, mandated, mentoring program for untenured faculty that would have the following components:

- o Two Library faculty members with tenure assigned as mentors to the new faculty member.
- o A plan for each new faculty member agreed by the mentors and the “**mentee**” setting out the goals for each year of the probationary period.
- o Annual formal reviews of progress toward **tenure/promotion**.

The Library (and perhaps the College) should consider a formal, mandated post-tenure review program for all faculty (up to and including full professors) to encourage continuing professional development, scholarly creativity and research productivity.

Fundraising

BC and, in particular, the Library's Special Collections, are a fertile ground for **fundraising**, if they are part of a coordinated campaign with a (currently non-existent) Library development **officer** and support from central administration. The development officer could include other **area(s)** besides the Library in that position's assignment. At the very least, the Library should have **free** access to existing (and future) funds that are designated for the Library. Including the Library as a prominent "check off" on solicitations and fundraising literature is a low cost and effective option. The Library should consider creating a "leadership council" of persons with the ability to make monetary gifts, good connections with other wealthy persons, and an interest in the Library.

Space

The Library and the Information Commons (Library **Café**) are extremely attractive, inviting and functional. However, the Library facility seems to be somewhat difficult to navigate, especially for persons unfamiliar with the building. We recommend that a **signage** review resulting in more effective signs be undertaken so that the building can be as useful as it is attractive. The prominent and abundant space to the right upon entering the library building could perhaps be used more creatively: in addition to exhibits, it could serve other appropriate library **and/or** college functions or needs.

As the self-study indicates, the Library will be out of space in just a few years. Now is the time to begin consideration of compact shelving installations in areas with load & bearing capacity to house lesser used archives in Special Collections, for example. These could be accompanied by **reading/studying** spaces or could be storage with the Archives in safe (locked) compact shelving that is also fire and flood proof.

Stationing a guard at the rear door (dock?) seems to be wasteful. An alternative is equipping the door with an alarm and installing recording cameras in the hallway leading to the dock area from the stacks area and another camera aimed at the dock door. Personnel savings **from** this could be better used elsewhere, including the assignment of a roaming security guard who would patrol all public areas of the library building.

Information Technology

For most academic libraries today, the major challenge is funding of library collections and electronic access to scholarly resources whose costs have risen faster than all but the wealthiest institutions' library budgets. BC's Library is no exception. However, for these evaluators, BC's Library, indeed the campus, faces yet another **challenge**—this one of its own making it seems—which if unresolved will compromise the efforts by central administration and the Library to realize the promise of costly information technology and library materials. The challenge is the **dysfunctional** relationship between the Library and AIT, on the one hand, and the college's Information Technology Services (ITS) organization, on the other.

We had neither the time nor the charge to discover the reasons for that relationship. In fairness to ITS and its head, Mark Gold, we had only one opportunity to speak with Mr. Gold. He gave us no indication of any concern by ITS' customers. That stated, we heard examples of dissatisfaction with ITS's support in critical operational areas by librarians, professional staff in AIT, and instructional faculty. The Library's self-study understated somewhat the level of dissatisfaction and extent of the problem that seems to exist. The examples cited involving ITS (dropping of licensed electronic-resources, **Ariel**; **EzProxy**; Internet content filtering; failure to install video-conferencing capacity in the Library auditorium) we believe are sufficiently known to readers of this document, so there is no need to elaborate.

Tension between the missions of central IT organization (security) and librarians and faculty (access) is a common theme in academe and a modicum of such tension is to be expected (and indeed, is found to one degree or another of many college and university campuses). However, we think the relationship between ITS and its BC constituents may not be productive. Indeed, we understand there have been instances when communications were not even civil. Disturbingly, ITS's administration was characterized to us by various constituencies (not just librarians) as "intractable," "proprietary," "unresponsive though faculty rant and rave," a "one-man show." The claim that "the senior college administration isn't interested in hearing about this (ITS)" was also **voiced** to us.

It was observed by one (non-librarian) faculty member that there is not a faculty advisory committee for ITS though there is for the Library and AIT. We believe that for planning, operational and, importantly, political reasons, an advisory committee for ITS would be useful. It is our firm conviction that neither the expressed charge by the University Chancellor to the College presidents to expand online course and program offerings, nor President **Kimmich's** commitment to expand graduate and science programs, will be accomplished until ITS, the Library and AIT and the Center for Teaching work cooperatively and collaboratively. As a start in that direction, we recommend that the College undertake an external evaluation of ITS.

Funding Challenges

It is clear that the Library has made impressive strides in providing the students and faculty with quality collections and services in a distinguished and distinctive setting. The extent to which it can continue to succeed will depend upon a number of factors. As in all academic libraries: "It's the content, stupid." And the content is expensive, especially in the sciences, where BC is making programmatic commitments. In February, 2007 President **Kimmich** said, "I insist that BC be represented among the lead institutions in the sciences at CUNY." That commitment will require **funding** of science materials that the current library materials budget will not sustain. Because subscriptions to scientific literature are recurring costs, continuing funding sources must be identified. In our view, BC should designate CUNY Compact

and Graduate Investment Program funds on a basis at least comparable to the other senior comprehensive colleges in the CUNY system. CUNY and the College have stated aims of increasing online instruction, asynchronous learning, and Web-enhanced courses. This will require coordination of the Library and AIT, the Center for Teaching and other units on campus dedicated to online learning. Also, it will require three new positions in the Library/AIT in our estimation: a second instructional designer, a systems programmer, and an E-Learning Librarian. Further, on the subject of library research materials, at a minimum, we recommend that the College fully fund materials inflation costs on an annual, continuing basis. This will ensure that the library collections will remain current into the future, albeit at a "steady-state" level (without new dollars in addition to inflation costs).

We believe that central administration understands and appreciates the Library's role in BC's reaching its academic aspirations. However, the administration's own plans give us pause. Where BC's 2005-2010 strategic plan lists as a goal: "Promote research and scholarship as a defining quality of a BC college experience," the library is not mentioned. The same document calls for renovation of offices and laboratory facilities; for humanists and social scientists libraries are largely their "laboratories." In the plan, library collections appear under, "Promote the further development of IT programs and this infrastructure that supports it" but they are cited only in the electronic context. While digital format resources will continue to increase in importance to the teaching and research mission, all formats, including print, multi-media, special collections, archives, etc. will be required. Central administration stated commitment to even the electronic format is couched as, "expand electronic library services to the extent possible." It is the only time a qualifier appears in the strategic plan.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that the state of the Brooklyn College Library/AIT is both strong and progressive. It is effectively led, well managed, well housed, service oriented, and efficient and creative in its use of information technology. It has a dedicated and productive faculty and staff and earned respect from the College community. We believe that it is poised to achieve even more, given targeted funding increases in support of agreed priorities and recognition of the central importance of the Library/AIT to the academic enterprise. We also believe that, if the range of recommendations contained in this report are implemented, as well as other items identified in the Self-study document are acted upon, the next external review of the Library/AIT will be even more positive.

Sincerely,

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