

COUNCIL ON LIBRARIES: ANNUAL REPORT, 2002-03

The Council on Libraries [CoL] met on eight occasions between September 2002 and May 2003, the last meeting of the year being a joint session with the Council on Computing. CoL membership conformed with that prescribed on p. 4 of the *OFDC*, the monthly meetings being slightly swelled by the regular attendance of C. Pawlek (Associate Librarian of the College) and L. Levine (Director of Computing) as invited guests and J. Quigley (Physical Sciences Librarian) as recorder.

The dominant issue of the year, a significant reduction in the Library's budget, had major repercussions for broad constituencies within both the faculty and the student body, and so occupied most of the CoL's attention for the first half of the year. The Librarian and CoL Chair considered the challenges posed by this budget cut to be so pressing by the end of the summer as to require the CoL hurriedly to schedule a special initial meeting on 26 September during the first week of classes. After outlining to the CoL how he and his staff proposed to meet these challenges within the context of the Library's official mission statement, the Librarian secured the Council's endorsement of the principles governing his approach to the problem. Communicating the potential impact of the reduced budget on library personnel, collections, and services in as timely a fashion as possible to both faculty and student audiences was quickly identified as a primary goal. In addition to posting the CoL's meeting agendas and minutes, major documents, and membership on the Library's Web site (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/col/col.html>), the Librarian and CoL Chair met with the Student Assembly and the full faculties (Sciences) or divisional councils (Humanities, Social Sciences, Programs) of the College of Arts and Sciences as soon during the Fall term as could be arranged in order to explain the anticipated changes and how these had been decided upon. Of particular concern to some faculty were changes in the operations of several branch libraries closely connected to particular departments [Sanborn (English), Sherman (Art History, Studio Art), Cook (Mathematics), Paddock (Music)]. All faculty were concerned about a proposed reduction in the acquisitions budget. Most of the former were successfully negotiated with the departments most directly involved, although the discontent provoked by the changed staffing and functioning of branch libraries continues among some faculty. From feedback received at the multitude of meetings described above, the Librarian and CoL Chair determined that a large segment of the faculty endorsed the actions regarding branches once they understood the trade-offs and the Librarian's plans for continuing, if somewhat modified, service. The cut originally scheduled for acquisitions was restored to the budget in January 2003 by special action of the President and Provost, but the reduced purchasing power of this budget line as a consequence of the dramatic inflation in the cost of information resources over the past fifteen years is an ongoing problem that remains to be addressed satisfactorily. At its February meeting, the CoL requested that the Librarian circulate to the faculty a summary assessment of the impact of the budget cuts on library services, collections, and staff, a document that was eventually mailed out on March 3.

The resignation of Philip Cronenwett as Special Collections Librarian in late February 2003 resulted in expressions of serious concern about the future of Rauner Special Collections Library on the part of faculty in the History and several Humanities departments. In early March the CoL endorsed a transition plan put forward by the Librarian. During the Winter/Spring term break and early in the Spring, the Librarian and CoL Chair sought to collect as much faculty opinion on the matter as possible through direct meetings with those identified by the Rauner staff as that library's principal users, whether for purposes of teaching or research. The Librarian also sought advice and counsel from the staff of the Rauner through individual meetings with each of them. The CoL devoted much of its March and early May meetings to discussion of a document entitled "Preliminary Assessment: Rauner Special Collections Library" drawn up by the interim managers of Rauner (D. Daily, W. Jolley), as well as to the qualifications and qualities that should be targeted in recruiting a successor "librarian-scholar-curator"

for the post vacated by Cronenwett. As was the case for the discussions during the Fall and early Winter terms precipitated by the budget cut, relevant documents were posted on the CoL's Web site. The CoL concluded its early May meeting by requesting that the Librarian send out an update to all faculty on the Library's current budgetary situation as well as a statement on the proposed future of Rauner. This second mailing will be sent out in the Fall, by which time the budget picture for FY05 should be clearer and the recruiting of a new Special Collections Librarian will have been initiated.

Aside from these two major items, the principal activity of the CoL over the course of the year consisted of reviewing and commenting on presentations by various members of the Library's staff on several new and important library initiatives to improve access to information resources and services: the design of the Digital Library (J. James, C. Pawlek); the activities of the Jones Media Center (M. Beahan); the new education program within the Library (S. Fliss); first steps in the evolution of an electronic reserves system (J. Taxman); and collaborations between Academic Computing and Library Education involving course Web sites and an Integrated Peer Tutoring Program (S. Fliss, J. Bohrer, M. Brown). At its final meeting with the Council on Computing, the CoL was introduced to the problem of the future of public computer clusters in Baker-Berry Library occasioned by the omission of funding for the maintenance and repair of such computers from the FY04 and FY05 Computing Services' permanent budgets. The two Councils agreed that more information on the usage of these computers would be required before any specific recommendations could be formulated. R. Lucier and L. Levine will appoint a joint library/computing services working group to assemble more data for the joint councils to review in fall 2004.

Throughout a year made difficult by the continuing downturn in the national economy, the readiness of the College's Librarian to meet at short notice to discuss Library policies with interested faculty and students, either in groups or individually, was truly impressive. Although his decisions regarding library services in particular have not met with universal approbation, he has made himself unusually accessible for consultation. Moreover, on more than one occasion (October 2002, in connection with the periodicals reading room and also the restoration of a government information specialist position) he has shown himself willing to reverse a decision in response to faculty opinion. The posting of all CoL business on a publicly accessible Web site is further evidence of his commitment to keeping faculty, students, and staff as well-informed as possible about the Library's policies and its ongoing initiatives. Richard Lucier is to be commended for communicating clearly to the academic community that he serves not only what the Library's policies are but what the rationale for them is.

Respectfully submitted –

Jeremy B. Rutter
Chair, 2002/03 Council on Libraries