ARL Status Report

Dean Carolyn Allen discussed the University of Arkansas Libraries’ goal of obtaining ARL status. We still have a ways to go before making an application to ARL. We will conduct a comprehensive review of where we stand, where we need to go, and what we need to get there.

Dean Allen distributed charts to show that we have moved up in status relative to our peers in the last couple of years. However, we need to increase our total library expenditures to place us around the midpoint of the ARL libraries, in the 40-50th percentile. We will work on increasing our funding through the upcoming capital campaign aimed at growing our endowment to enable us to increase both our materials expenditures and our total expenditures. Our materials expenditures rank below our peers. The number of volumes is not as important as it has been in the past, but it is still significant. We have to have a significant research collection and unique collections. Our Special Collections materials are on a par with other peers, except for the rare books. The other measures evaluated are salaries and wages expenditures and number of professional staff as compared to our peers.

If we did apply and were denied, we would have to wait three years before reapplying. We will amass more capital, wait to evaluate our additional funding coming from the increase student fee next year and any grant overhead costs, and allow ourselves time to grow and to demonstrate a continuum of growth for five years. The university administration gave Special Collections $250,000 one-time funds for rare books and a $42,000 increase to the base budget for rare books.

QUESTION: What types of materials is Special Collections looking to collect?

ANSWER: We will focus on building our current collections, such as Arkansas and regional history, as well as the well-used Fulbright Papers and State Department materials. We continue to enlarge our manuscript holdings; we just don’t have enough bodies to process the manuscripts we have acquired. ARL would evaluate the depth and breadth of our collections.

QUESTION: Would it be a good idea to pass a Faculty Senate resolution asking the campus administration to support the Libraries’ pursuit of ARL status?

ANSWER: There would be no problem doing it, we appreciate the support, but the issue is not a lack of support from the administration. ARL routinely looks at land grant institutions in states without an ARL member, and has recently looked at us and did not issue an invitation. We need to demonstrate continuing growth in both the budget and collections. We have begun to grow, but we need more years of proven growth. We have and are receiving support from the executive council, who have given us one-time funds, pushed the new student library fee, and the percentage of the grant overheads. We are seeing the impact of the university’s growth on our facilities and collections; there are not enough seats, for instance for the student body. However, if the Faculty Senate made a statement, it would complement our goal.

QUESTION: Who sets the student fees?
ANSWER: Any change in fees has to be approved by the system and the Board of Trustees. We asked for a $5 per credit hour student fee, we were awarded $1.25 this year, which will increase to $2.5 next year.

QUESTION: Can we ask for a $5 graduate student fee?

ANSWER: Graduate students pay their fees out of pocket; fees can’t be paid by stipends awarded by departments. Graduate students know the value of good journals in their fields, and know what they cost.

DEAN’S RESPONSE: The university has been historically so underfunded, that it is just difficult to catch up. The executive council works to put the money they have where it is most needed. However, the chancellor has a vision of the University of Arkansas rises to the top 50 research universities, and the Libraries have to rise to meet that goal. If the Libraries do not rise to reach the increased level of teaching and research, then we won’t get there.

COMMENT: Our Interlibrary Loan is so good that no one in my department sees a need for improving the Libraries. They get everything we need.

RESPONSE: Our Interlibrary Loan is a “net borrower,” which means we borrow from other libraries more than we send to them. Net borrower status is a big negative in the library field. Other libraries don’t want us to be dependent on their collections.

QUESTION: What would prevent us from applying in two years?

ANSWER: The current increases in our budget base barely cover the serials increase each year. The 10% average increase was about $700,000 this year, and it will increase the next year and the next. We have already cut and cut serials. We either have to increase the base each year or cut the tools for teaching and research. We estimate that the student fees will be $1.2 million next year, which will be spent on collections only, or possibly equipment that is used solely by students. But we have to be good stewards of the students’ money and put it where they need it.

We need to take a measure of where we are as compared to the 50th percentile libraries in the ARL. Right now that would be about $25 million in library expenditures and $6-8 million on collections. We spent $5.7 on collections last year, including the Law Library. We ask for one-time funds to cover new programs, but those serials costs are ongoing. The infusion of money varies with the growth of new programs, so it is difficult to predict. It is not just STEM programs that are expensive to support, some humanities fields like art and media are costly. There are also hidden fees like copyright and performance rights and memberships in consortia that are necessary to be a part of the research enterprise.

QUESTION: Why can’t we just meet the minimum of the bottom ARL institutions and be admitted?

ANSWER: The ARL has become more exclusive and restricting of its membership. Institutions measuring against the bottom half are not admitted. We need to be equal to those in the 40-50 percentile ranking to be considered.
QUESTION: Are those measurements pro-rated by size of the student body and institution?

ANSWER: No. Each is measured against others’ expenditures, period.

QUESTION: How can we justify asking for $11 million dollar increase in funding for the Libraries?

ANSWER: The solution will have to come from a combination of student fees, increase state funding, and fundraising.

QUESTION: Once a library becomes a member of the ARL, can they be booted out?

ANSWER: Yes. The only reason the member libraries are being allowed to fall below the index and standards is because of the economic downturn.

COMMENT: This seems to be an almost impossible mountain to climb. We would need a $170 million endowment to generate that increase in the base budget.

ANSWER: We already have the second largest endowment of public universities in the United States. Kentucky is number one with $64 million. Ours is currently $23 million, down from $32 million before the economic downturn.

QUESTION: Are the ARL criteria published?

ANSWER: Yes, and we provided that information to you in the agenda email.

QUESTION: The aspirational goal of $11 seems unachievable. What are some incremental goals that we can establish and reach?

ANSWER: The chancellor and provost have asked the Libraries to pursue ARL status. We have to focus on fundraising, and ask the state legislators to fund the library budget base by $2 million.

QUESTION: Would that course be supported by the administration?

ANSWER: Yes. All of our budget increases in the past decade at least have come from the University funds and from donors, not from the state legislators.

QUESTION: Is it strategically beneficial to apply and be turned down? Would this better make our case with legislators and the administration?

ANSWER: It is too difficult to project their response to such a course of action. If we could get the budget increase to $20 million annually, that would put us on par with Kentucky which is currently 67 in the ranks. The ranks are a moving target, and it is impossible to predict where it would be in five years.

Pursuing ARL status would have to be a top priority of the university for this to happen. We would have to demonstrate sustained growth for five years before we apply. We are at least three years away from being able to demonstrate that. And that will depend upon whether or not we can get the budget base increased significantly.
Our incremental goals will be to increase the budget base by $2-3 million each year, which will have to come from a combination of student fees, endowment income, and state funding. If we increase our endowment significantly, then maybe that will help make our case to the legislators of the significance of this goal.

We did have a number of years in which we had to return budget money to the university, but we have seen no decrease in the past decade. We have had a number of serials cuts, and have cut all the possible fat. We have to continue to be lean in our collecting, focused only on those materials that will help us rise in the rankings.

Traditionally libraries have collected materials that were not high use or unused, but collected them for future use, but in today’s tight budget climate, we can’t do that. Exigencies have to be covered with our current funds.

The issue boils down to support for the Libraries, whether we make the ARL application or not.

QUESTION: Are the Libraries receiving grant overhead fees?

ANSWER: Yes, our 2% cut began on July 1, but we have not received any funds to date. The faculty and deans understand that maintaining a good library is the cost of doing business, a support function of their success. Funds for new faculty and new research areas are funded by the departments. The provost provides some one time funds to cover new faculty. We asked for funds to cover new academic programs and new degrees, and are now getting that. Before two years ago, we had to shift our collections purchases to support any new programs.

QUESTION: What would the dean like the Faculty Senate Library Committee to do?

ANSWER: Help spread the word that an application to the ARL is at least two years away, and is dependent upon us obtaining a lot of money to make that happen. Steve’s suggestion of a Faculty Senate statement of support is a good one. We might ask committee members to talk about the Libraries to donors, possibly take on fundraising trips. We need feedback on how well, or how we are not, supporting your areas. Speak candidly about shortfalls in your departments. Garner faculty support. Include the Libraries in donor proposals for your colleges, a strategy which worked well in the last capital campaign.

QUESTION: Are you having this same conversation with the deans?

ANSWER: Planning on it, but faculty can add their voices. The dean of Libraries asking for funds is a broken record. Faculty can explain the significance of what we do and why we do it and how what we do impacts what the faculty do.

QUESTION: Have you gathered any quantifiable data from faculty and students?

ANSWER: We conducted our last LIBQUAL survey a few years ago.

COMMENT: Interlibrary Loan is still cheaper than buying subscriptions to certain journals.

ANSWER: True. And there is nothing we can do about that. It is what it is.
COMMENT: It is a prestige issue. We have two million volumes, Nebraska and Oklahoma have twice that number. We faculty have no perception of their universities being twice as good as ours.

DEAN’S RESPONSE: We need to generate some talking points. We’ll pick a target institution at the 40th percentile rank and compile some data about their resource expenditures. We’ll break the issue into component pieces. We don’t rank too badly against our peers in dollars spent per student.

QUESTION: Will the dean be willing to speak to the Library Senate about the value of achieving ARL status?

ANSWER: Yes. We need to repeat the story across campus consistently to demonstrate the need for an infusion of funds or reallocation. The faculty would not support a reallocation. We need to paint the picture of where we are so that the faculty see how we compare to the peer institutions. Everyone understands the value of such a comparison.

COMMENT: Pride in the university is an issue for faculty. It would be a difficult topic to talk about with the Faculty Senate, unless the dean presents the information herself. The dean could explain what ARL is and why it is important to our mission and goal. She could create interest and a wave of support from the faculty, who need to be educated before they make their decision. It would be very useful for our faculty to know where we are in relation to our peers.