

More Room for People!

“The University that can solve its library problems can probably solve anything.”

Stated by former McGill Vice-Principal Walter Hitschfeld (1)

I. Introduction and Mandate

Following a proposal made by the Dean of Libraries to reorganize the way in which library services are delivered to students and faculty, we were asked to consult widely in order that all stakeholders who wished could be heard. We were mandated by Dean Cook and Dean Eidelman to make recommendations about how to provide library services in the future, taking into consideration the impact of changing patterns of usage, modern information technology, and the current budgetary reality. While ideally it would have been desirable to systematically study best practices developed elsewhere, our timeframe was limited by McGill’s budgetary situation and therefore this was not possible. We are conscious of the fact that university libraries throughout the world are attempting to cope with similar problems.

We were asked to specifically address the following three areas: access to collections, access to librarian services, and access to study space.

II. The Consultation Process

A notice was sent to faculty members, Life Science Librarians and library staff, students and medical residents informing them that they could either attend formal consultations or submit proposals or opinions by e-mail.

Three formal consultations were held. The first, on Friday, May 10, was a consultation with the Librarians (seven individuals) and staff (six individuals) of the Life Sciences Library. On Thursday, May 16, a consultation took place with students and residents (30 individuals) and on Wednesday, May 22, with faculty (24 individuals). Several individuals attended more than one meeting.

The following formal written submissions were received:

A submission from the Department of Social Studies of Medicine recommending that both the historical and circulating collections of the Osler library remain in place. The submission also outlined a possible method whereby the Osler Library could be physically restructured in order to accommodate the proposed changes.

Christopher Lyons, the Osler Librarian also submitted a similar proposal, and the recently retired Osler Librarian referred to the symbiotic relationship that should exist between the Life Sciences Library and the Osler Library.

(1) McGill University (1971). *The Report of the McGill University Libraries Commission*, Montreal, QC, p. iii

The Life Sciences Librarians outlined four possible scenarios, the second of which that would entail the librarians and a restricted collection remaining in the McIntyre Building, was their preferred option.

The Library Assistants, represented by their MUNACA representative, presented the pros and cons from their point of view.

Finally, the Life Sciences Library Advisory Committee communicated a resolution that had been passed strongly endorsing the position of the Life Sciences Librarians.

Forty seven e-mail communications were received from students, residents, faculty, and alumni expressing a variety of opinions. Virtually all referred to the importance of maintaining the electronic database and access to the collections.

III. General Comments

1. Change must occur. This quote from a 2004 article seems prescient. "Branch library closures and mergers will accelerate in coming years, especially in the libraries heavily dependent on information in serial format, libraries serving subject areas with substantial electronic resources, and libraries with stressed budgets." (2) The situation in the library domain has not changed and indeed virtually every library in the world is addressing these issues. Some have chosen to close life sciences libraries, others have been merged with other units, and other universities have chosen to maintain their libraries. This issue is particularly acute at McGill because of the extremely difficult budgetary situation in which the university finds itself through no fault of its own.

It should be stressed however, that even in the absence of budgetary strictures, it would be desirable to improve the delivery of library services through reorganizations and reorientations. Changing patterns of use and the predominance of digital and electronic sources in the life sciences have made many practices obsolete. Thus our major objective has been to determine how best to deliver services to the users of the Life Sciences Library in the future. While we must work within the current budgetary reality, we also must recognize that things can be improved in spite of these imperatives.

2. Caution must be exercised in implementing change. The McGill Life Sciences Library was the first in Canada, dating from 1823. It has served an extraordinarily productive community throughout these many years and has real symbolic value, a fact that was reflected in a majority of communications received both in person and via e-mail. Library services constitute an important part of accreditation, ratings of faculties of medicine and universities, and the opinions of alumni and donors. Thus ensuring that services continue to be delivered satisfactorily and being perceived as being so delivered is very important.

(2) Steve Hiller (2004). Measure by Measure: Assessing the Viability of the Physical Library. *Bottom Line. Managing Library Finances*, pp. 126-131 at p. 131

3. It is also important to point out that the McIntyre and Stewart Buildings represent the focus of activities of the majority of students and faculty in these disciplines. While we recognize that Nursing is on the main campus and closer to activities there, the majority of teaching and research in life sciences and biology revolve around the McIntyre and Stewart Buildings. Dentistry, which is also physically removed, is involved in the life sciences complex as dental students share the curriculum with medical students for the first eighteen months of their instruction and will thus be participating in the revised curriculum that will require more input from the library and librarians.

4. The prevailing opinion of those who came before us was that services must be delivered from in or near the McIntyre and Stewart buildings. Some explained that going to the main campus for services could lead to these services not being utilized, a situation deemed to be unacceptable. A representative of the Biology Department stated this opinion very forcefully. However, we were disappointed by the overall size of the response to our call for opinions and suggestions on these important matters.

5. Individuals involved in the revised undergraduate curriculum for medical and dental students pointed out that there would actually be an increased demand for librarian services beginning in September of 2013. Students will be required to do a research project which will necessitate assistance from librarians and librarians will be implicated in teaching an expanded program on Evidence Based Medicine. Clearly more librarian time in the McIntyre Building will be involved.

6. Finally, a frequently heard opinion was that the Life Sciences and Education Libraries are bearing the brunt of this budgetary exercise. Without question, this resonates with many students and faculty who feel that this is unjust, despite the necessity for change and budgetary austerity. Given the relative prominence of the life sciences within the McGill community and wider society, this must be taken into account.

IV. The Three Issues: Access to Collections, Librarians, and Space

Access to Collections:

Our understanding of the salient features of proposed changes are as follows:

- The life sciences Library collections will be moved to The Schulich Library of Science and Engineering;
- There will be no substantial removal of books or material from the collection;
- There will be timely inter-branch delivery to the McIntyre Building of print materials guaranteed to faculty and students;
- The potential for scanning and e-delivery of materials will be explored and if feasible will be implemented;
- The reserve collection of print material will continue to be housed in the McIntyre building;
- The historical and circulating collection of the Osler library will remain in place;

2. Our Reactions to these proposed changes:

There is general agreement that the collections currently housed in the McIntyre building can be easily accessed from other locations, a position that we endorse. While some elimination of material may be

necessary, the historical importance of the collection indicates that it should be kept together as a national resource.

Clearly moving the collections is only feasible if access to them is timely and convenient for the core users of that collection. Thus the extension of the current inter-branch delivery system to the merged collection in Schulich is absolutely essential.

We agree that scanning and e-delivery services should be implemented as soon as feasible. However, access to hard copies must be maintained for those who desire them.

The print reserve collection is of extreme importance to students and residents and should be kept together at a service point in the McIntyre building.

We agree with the unanimous opinions voiced that the online services must at a bare minimum be maintained.

We agree, as does the Dean of Libraries, that both the historical and circulating portions of the Osler library should remain where they are currently housed. Continued use of the historical materials by scholars requires the presence of the circulating collection at the Osler Library as the circulating collection explicates the historical material.

Access to Librarians

1. Our understanding of the salient features of proposed changes are as follows:

The Life Sciences Librarians should be moved to the Schulich Library. Their number will not be decreased and they will remain working full-time as Life Sciences Liaison Librarians with no other duties. They will deliver their services to students, faculty, and scholars using two major pathways. Some of their time will be devoted to holding scheduled office hours in the McIntyre Medical Sciences building and they will also be embedded in the departments with which they have been traditionally associated, providing services to these departments in a range of locations.

Their involvement in teaching, curricular development, and research will continue using scheduled time.

2. Our Reactions:

We hold divergent views on this important issue.

On the one hand, Daniel Boyer is in substantial agreement with the proposed changes: His reasons are as follows. He believes that economies of scale will result in cost savings for the library. Furthermore, there should be substantial benefits to McGill users as a whole from the synergies resulting from contact between Life Sciences Librarians and Librarians skilled in serving students and faculty from other scientific disciplines. He believes that current and even expanded services can be delivered in a satisfactory fashion if the life sciences Librarians are based in the Schulich Library. In addition, more space will be freed for other purposes. Finally, since the medical collection could move to the Schulich Library, it will be necessary, at times, for librarians and staff to answer questions related to medical materials as the Schulich librarians are not trained to do so.

On the other hand, Richard Cruess believes that the life sciences librarians should remain in the McIntyre Medical Sciences building. The cost savings of their move have not been made evident and he believes that they will not be substantial. He believes that the majority of the activities of Life Sciences Librarians relate to services required from those who regard the McIntyre and Stewart buildings as the focus of their activities. He believes that librarians based on the main campus will not deliver services as effectively and will waste much time in unnecessary travel. The space needs of the librarians are modest. The principal reason however is that the services required by users must be easily available and he does not believe that this can be achieved with office hours or appointments. He believes it to be unwise to physically move the Health Sciences Librarians from those that they serve. Dean Cook has indicated that there are administrative reasons to group Health Sciences and Science Librarians together so that greater control can be exercised over their activities. This is a position with which he disagrees.

Access to Space

1. Our understanding of the salient features of proposed changes are as follows:

The space currently housing collections and personnel would be made available to the Faculty of Medicine and the wider University with the understanding that this space will be used to expand study and teaching facilities.

2. Our Reactions:

We are in complete agreement with re-purposing the space. As stated in the introductory remarks, there is a broad consensus that both study and teaching space must be expanded. Thus this new direction is in no way controversial.

V: Recommendations

- 1. The Life Sciences Library should not be closed and its name should be retained. Its space and activities should be reorganized in order to better deliver library services to students, faculty, and scholars in a fashion more appropriate to the digital age.**
- 2. For the above to occur, a service point must remain in the McIntyre building. This service point should provide access to reserve materials, consultation services, and to print material through the inter-branch delivery system.**
- 3. Reserve materials should be housed at the service point.**
- 4. The availability of digital materials should be maintained and if possible expanded.**
- 5. Both the historical and circulating collections of the Osler library should remain in place.**

- 6. As Co-Chairs of this committee we understand and respect each other's opinions concerning the home base of the Life Sciences Librarians. However, as stated above, we cannot agree and therefore are unable to come up with a single recommendation on this basic issue.**
- 7. We enthusiastically endorse the recommendation to utilize the space freed by moving the collections to expand individual and group study space and to add small group teaching rooms.**
- 8. We recommend that the Deans of Medicine and of Libraries institute a formal process to evaluate the results the changes made twelve to eighteen months after their implementation in order to ascertain their impact and judicious nature on the users.**

Respectfully submitted on May 29th 2013,

Daniel Boyer

Richard L. Cruess