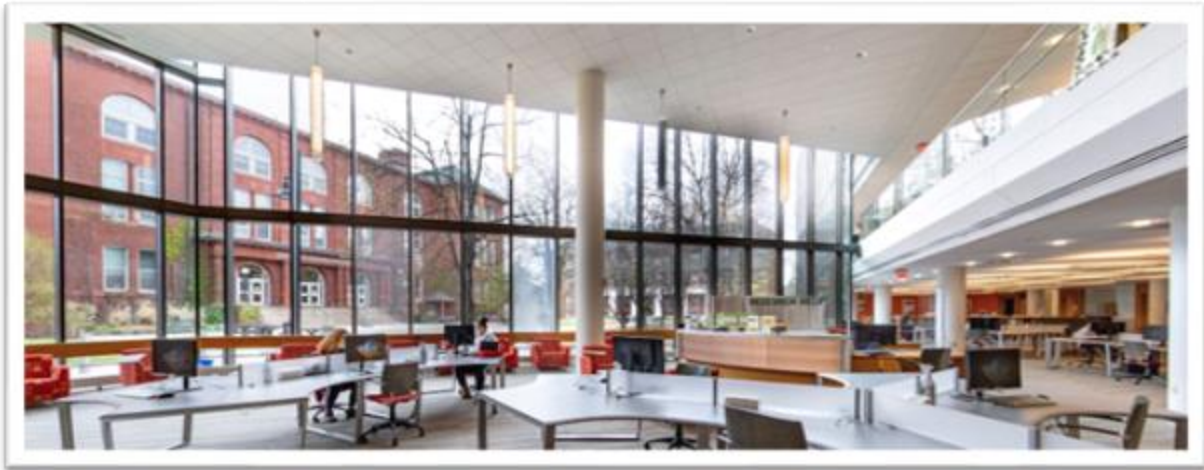




An External Review of the Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library at Fitchburg State University

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In Spring 2023, Fitchburg State University (FSU) invited Elizabeth McKeigue, the Dean of the Library at Salem State University, a peer institution, to conduct an external review of the FSU's Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library (AGCL).

The following review is primarily based on a detailed and thoughtful self-study written in Winter 2023 by the AGCL staff, led by Dean of the Library Jacalyn Kremer. The review is further informed by the honest and constructive feedback gathered during an in-person, one-day site visit in March 2023 which included interviews and discussions with several key library stakeholders, including the library dean, most of the librarians and library staff, a few faculty, a student, and the Provost.

The self-study identifies several impressive achievements by the library, many of which the staff emphasized during the site visit interviews as being the accomplishments of which they are most proud. Particularly notable were the following:

- Agility of all library staff in ongoing responsiveness to COVID challenges
- Implementation of Controlled Digital Lending (CDL)
- Development of impactful DEI initiatives that now serve as models for other academic libraries
- Increase in the number and scope of digital collections, including e-books, streaming media and other e-resources
- Rigorous discernment process to identify a new integrated library system (ILS) software platform and the successful implementation of Alma
- Major progress made in building a culture of assessment for continuous improvement
- Making college more affordable for FSU students through textbook affordability and open education initiatives and serving as a leader in this work statewide
- Engagement with campus partners and deep integration with campus-wide student success initiatives
- Commitment to the mentoring of student employees and the creation of the "Resumé Builder" pamphlet as a resource for student workers to help them to write strong resumé that describe their library work in a way that demonstrates skills that are applicable to other jobs

General Observations

A close reading and a careful analysis of the report, combined with a full day of engagement with the stakeholders of the library, leads to the following impressions:

- The AGCL staff have and are accomplishing a remarkable breadth and depth of achievements with significantly limited time and money, due entirely to the hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence of the librarians, staff, and library administration.
- The AGCL staff are particularly well-attuned to important trends in librarianship and are highly responsive to the needs of today's students and faculty. Staff are especially focused on excellence in library teaching, data-driven decision making, faculty and campus

partnerships, and DEI initiatives. They care deeply about student success and generally have a positive attitude about working at the library.

- The library's budget is comparatively under resourced in ongoing funding dedicated to building and supporting collections, as well as in the number of full-time librarians and staff dedicated to supporting the library's core services and programming.
- The lack of an institutional repository for a university the size and scope of FSU was surprising.
- There are not enough unionized supervisory staff on-site during all the hours the library is open, routinely leaving part-time employees with the full burden of responsibility for all operations and the safety of the physical library, especially on weekends.
- It was noted throughout the report and in interviews that faculty and students who make regular use of the library are generally happy with the services they use or know about, but there is a strong perception among the staff (supported by 2021 survey data) that faculty and students are not as well informed about the library's services and accomplishments as they should be.
- The Hammond Campus Center, of which the library is part, is bright, welcoming, and lively. The layout can be a bit confusing for the first-time visitor and it wasn't easily clear, either upon entry or at other key points in the building, which student services were located there.
- The library is the default place for students to get all manner of IT tech support and help with printing because the IT help desk is in another building on the other side of the quad.

Primary Recommendations

The recommendations below are summarized from the comments in the "Responses" section of this report. Also noted is a sense of the level of urgency of each recommendation and an idea of what the risks are of not making changes.

Recommendation	Level of urgency	What is the risk of not doing it?
1. Additional Library Assistant(s): Add/advocate for a minimum of 1 additional full-time AFSCME Library Assistant II or III position to provide supervision and appropriate coverage for evening and weekend hours.	As soon as possible	Inadequate number of full-time staff makes it difficult to maintain regular operational hours, reduces the availability of experienced library workers at the hours when students most need them, increases the risk of being underprepared to address emergencies, and increases the pressure on other staff, including the dean, to be available frequently during their off-hours to address issues.
2. Additional Librarian(s): Add/advocate for a minimum of 1 additional tenure-track MSCA librarian position to cover key responsibilities (such as Online	In the next year	Several librarians reported that they are "wearing multiple hats" and as a result, feel "burned out" and that they struggle to find the time to keep

Learning, Scholarly Communication, Digital Initiatives) that remain unassigned after an analysis of current librarians' position descriptions.		up with so many responsibilities (not all of which are in their specialty area) or to take on new initiatives.
3. Single-Service Point: Merge reference and circulation first-contact services into a single service point at the existing Circulation Desk and provide on-call reference services; Eliminate physical Reference Desk or consider partnering with IT to use that desk as a satellite IT help desk that is regularly staffed by IT staff and/or student workers during peak hours.	By Fall Semester 2023	Staffing two separate service points on the same floor within 50-100 feet of each other is inefficient. Keeping multiple service points staffed contributes significantly to staff burnout.
4. Increase funding sources for research, teaching, and learning materials: Advocate for a commitment to increase the library's materials budget by 4-8% per year to address inflation and to acquire new materials that support course material affordability for students; increase awareness by university financial managers of the significant impact of annual inflation on library operations.	In the next 1-2 years	Without annual budget increases, the library is increasingly unable to keep up with the cost of providing core materials and will be unable to acquire new ongoing resources; faculty may lose access to resources they use in teaching, requiring them to find the time to redesign their courses and/or result in passing the cost of accessing learning materials back to students.
5. Institutional Repository: Explore the creation of a Fitchburg State University institutional repository to increase access to and discovery of FSU faculty scholarship and FSU student theses.	In the next 1-3 years	Without a repository, access to and promotion of student research output and faculty scholarship is limited and/or not easy to discover, share, or promote. Also, without this, FSU will fall behind the standard offerings of peer institutions who offer repositories among their core library services.
6. Re-examine remote work policies: Consider providing additional remote work possibilities, at certain times of the year, for certain positions that have a research or service improvement requirement in their position descriptions.	As soon as possible	By contract, librarians are assessed on their professional growth and continuing scholarship, in addition to the performance of their general duties and service to the University. Without dedicated professional development time and some flexibility of location, it will be harder for librarians and other

		administrative staff to be successful in performance reviews, post-tenure review, and/or to achieve tenure.
7. Research profiles for librarians: Include librarians' profiles in FSU's faculty profiles directory with their education, job duties, research interests, and research output included.	In 6 months to 1 year	Without finding ways to showcase librarians on par with faculty, librarians continue to experience low morale and sense of inequality, which contributes to lower engagement, burn-out, and a decrease in the ability to retain high-performing staff.
8. LibQual+ survey: Consider implementing the industry-standard benchmarking survey instrument LibQual+ to measure library users' minimum, perceived, and desired levels of service quality.	In the next 1-2 years	The risk of designing and running home-grown surveys is that they take considerable staff time and training to design and administer, and they also limit a library's ability to benchmark and compare their results against hundreds of other peer institutions.
9. Review job descriptions: Librarians and staff should be given time to thoughtfully consider and draft revisions to their job descriptions to match current library needs and to make best use of each employee's experience and skills.	In the next 6 months to 1 year	Without a critical and collaborative look at current responsibilities and clarification of duties, staff may lack the authority, autonomy, and support to succeed in their goals without experiencing frustration and stress, leading to burnout and/or critical staff vacancies.

Responses to the Program Review Self-Study

1. Institutional Effectiveness

The AGCL has made strong progress towards developing meaningful assessment practices and becoming a data-driven library. Some highlights include the librarians' development of a set of undergraduate information literacy outcomes and the library's involvement with the development of an assessment program for the new General Education Curriculum. Other things related to institutional effectiveness that the library is doing particularly well include preparing data-rich annual reports which are publicly available and the library's development of a Disaster Planning Manual. The library's impressive 5-year Assessment Plan is highly ambitious; however, it presents clear goals with a detailed timetable that will guide the library in managing the work ahead.

The library's future goal to increase the number of funded training opportunities for staff and librarians is crucial to the success of the assessment plan. The staff need the time away from other responsibilities to pursue training as well. The library administration and other library leaders should help librarians and staff to prioritize their workloads in order to make room for training time. It may mean saying no to some things and the library administration should aim to be as supportive of that as possible, given core service needs. Without quality training in the process of gathering, analyzing, and reporting on qualitative data and without the immediate chance to practice putting it into action, the goals of the assessment plan will not be possible.

In addition to the activities in the assessment plan, the library should consider implementing a benchmarking survey instrument such as [LibQual+](https://www.libqual.org/) on a regular schedule (e.g. every 4 years) to measure library users' minimum, perceived, and desired levels of service quality. Some of the things the LibQual+ survey process does is to help libraries assess and improve library services, change organizational culture, and market the library. LibQual+ is also a significant learning and scholarly research opportunity for librarians who choose to participate with the implementation and analysis. LibQual+ staff also provide extensive training and customer service assistance to make implementation and analysis easier on an already stretched-thin staff. According to the LibQual+ list of past participants on its website¹, Fitchburg State last participated in LibQual+ in 2013² and prior to that, in 2007.

2. Professional Values

The entire staff of the AGCL clearly strive to live up to their commitments to recognize “the inherent worth and dignity of every member” of their community and to ensure “equitable and impartial access to resources, services, and programs – as expressed in the library's values statement.

¹ <https://www.libqual.org/about/participants>

² Salem State University also last participated in 2013, under another dean, and plans to implement LibQual+ Lite in Fall 2023. FSU and SSU staff could support each other and share expertise by conducting the survey on the same schedule.

Some of the ways the library is making great progress in taking action on these commitments include forming an Anti-Racism Team, seeking internal grants to fund DEI training for all library staff, supporting the needs of neurodiverse students, building representation for underrepresented voices in the archival collections, and through the development of a clearly documented and defined Library Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Plan. The DEI plan is thorough, but ambitious and will require additional resources (staff time and training, in particular) in order to be successful. There are major challenges for all libraries in sustaining and increasing the impact of DEI and social justice initiatives, and AGCL is no exception. In particular, DEI work needs a team leader (or co-team leaders) specifically charged with moving the work forward, advocating for resources, and keeping this work on the radar as a top priority for the library.

Another area in which the AGCL is to be commended is by making college more affordable for FSU students through the library's promotion and support of using open education resources in teaching. Fitchburg State's library is also well known among its peers as a leader in the collaborative statewide OER work spearheaded by the MA Department of Higher Education (DHE). The key performance indicators that were developed by the AGCL's dean and a librarian are now part of the DHE's expectations of all public higher education institutions to report on an annual basis. One observation, however, was that some staff feel disconnected from this work. The library administration should interrogate that concern further with the staff and look for ways for staff to feel more connected to the work.

A question that often comes up for libraries is whether the OER work being done on our campuses is sustainable. Many libraries, including AGCL, have only been able to launch an OER initiative by securing major grants. It is impressive the AGCL has been successful in seeking grants, but library programs and services that are fully dependent on grant funding can struggle to be sustainable. A dedicated, on-going, university-funded budget line, overseen by the library would minimize the work required to apply for internal grant funding every year and would firmly demonstrate textbook affordability as a top priority for the university.

3. Educational Role

Librarians commented that they were particularly proud of their agile response to teaching demands during and post-COVID and their pivot to online teaching. However, it has been very challenging. Librarians are concerned that University administrators don't fully understand how underprepared incoming students are since COVID, especially when it comes to information literacy. Librarians note that they are having to spend more time on class preparation to address the additional learning needs of students. There is also a feeling among them that the University administration doesn't know or realize how much all AGCL staff are putting into these efforts because their skill and professionalism make it look effortless and/or because their labor is behind the scenes.

The AGCL's 24-hr chat service is a high-touch service that no other State University library currently offers. This service is a great step towards working more efficiently as it operates via a combination of local and outsourced labor. More assessment and research should be done to gauge whether students, faculty, and others who are using the chat service are truly getting the expert service they need, given the outsourcing to staff who do not always have FSU-specific experience.

The self-study includes a data-point that librarians teach over 200 classes a year reaching over 4,000 students across academic disciplines. The number of library classes taught per year given the number of instruction librarians on staff is impressive, but it is also a concern for how much instruction (and instruction prep) a limited number of staff must be doing in addition to all the other responsibilities they have. There is also a pressing need to develop more point-of-need, self-service instruction media for student learning, such as how-to videos, but that work takes time and training that the current staff do not necessarily have. The hiring of an online digital librarian position would go a long way to supporting all of the librarians in developing both their synchronous and asynchronous online teaching skills.

The small group of faculty interviewed during the site visit were very happy with the library's instructional services, its scope of collections, and especially its talented staff, but faculty also admitted to not feeling fully informed about everything the library offers and does.

4. Discovery

Alma implementation has been successful, and it appears there has been a very positive response to it on campus. However, it was an incredibly heavy lift for staff and there is still so much to improve on their own, with some assistance from the vendor. The library is not part of a broader library network, like other libraries of its size and scale, which puts a greater burden on the staff to have the time and the expertise to run and trouble-shoot all systems.

The librarians also raised the point that the lack of an online institutional repository (IR) at FSU is an important issue. An IR would provide discovery support for faculty scholarship and for student theses, and would provide for the preservation and access to that scholarly work. Another benefit of an IR includes increasing the global visibility and academic reputation of FSU. Several of FSU's peer institutions in the State University system have been establishing and growing their institutional repositories in the past decade.

5. Collections

Academic libraries everywhere struggle with the continuous challenge of acquiring scholarly books, journals, and other media in the face of ongoing excessive rates of inflation in the publishing industry and declining or flat university budgets. It is especially challenging for academic libraries in public, state-funded institutions. The comparative data presented in the report suggests that FSU is slightly behind its peers in the amount of spending per student on library materials.

FSU, like most academic libraries, has to make difficult cancelation decisions every year just to keep the most essential resources given the pressure of inflation. The most recent Periodicals Price Survey³ in *Library Journal* predicts that the cost of Social Science and Science journals will continue to increase each year by an average of 5.3%. Arts and Humanities journals are projected to increase by 3.5%. The library administration should continue to advocate for a commitment to increase the

³ "Going for Gold, Deep in the Red" *Library Journal*. April 11, 2023.

<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/going-for-gold-deep-in-the-red>

library's materials budget by 4-8% per year to address inflation and to increase awareness by University financial managers of the significant impact of annual inflation on library operations.

The librarians also reported that they would like the time and support to develop a more transparent process and clear workflow for canceling resources, to working with vendors, and to choosing new materials, especially electronic resources.

Also, the Archival collections need attention. The library should explore external funding sources for collection growth, preservation, digitization, and processing of archives and special collections. The library should also consider how to utilize the Archives space and services as a fundraising tool to engage the external community and alumni in their giving to the library.

6. Space

The AGCL is physically integrated into the stunning Hammond Campus Center and the vibrant energy of the Center's community areas blends subtly into the library's active academic spaces. The renovation of the library in 2016 is cited by the staff who participated in the design as one of the top accomplishments of the last several years and they are very proud of the space. The library's prime location within a campus student center and its adjacency to the student advising center, bookstore, dining areas, and game room no doubt draws in students in a way that other universities with stand-alone libraries in less central locations would find enviable. FSU students greatly benefit by having easy access to spaces for eating, socializing, and buying necessities combined with study space and access to research help. The Hammond Campus Center truly feels like it is both physically and spiritually the heart of campus.

The strengths of the AGCL within the Hammond Campus Center include a great variety of workspace options, reservable group study spaces, and a media production room. Some staff commented on how they would like to see the library as more of a "learning commons", but it's not clear everyone has a shared vision of how they would define what that is. The Hammond Campus Center already houses several student support services that, along with the library, typically make up a traditional Learning Commons, such as tutoring and writing support. The administration and library should consider gathering feedback from stakeholders to define what a "learning commons" might look like for the FSU campus. FSU should consider what other student services would make better sense being located within or closer to the library.

Another major consideration of space is the maintenance and staffing of two separate service points on the same floor for library help: the Circulation Desk and the Reference Desk. Many libraries the size and scope of the AGCL have eliminated a stand-alone reference desk in an era of increased virtual research and specialized consultation services and have consolidated library help into a single service point. Co-locating in-person reference, information, and circulation services at a single service desk will be more efficient and help alleviate the pressure on staff to keep multiple desks appropriately staffed. Many libraries find that the triage model⁴ of service works well at a single service point. In this model, student assistants or other front-line staff, identify the type of question received, consult a librarian or other skilled library staff member who is available on-call

⁴ The *Journal of Access Services* (2016) volume 13, issue 2 is an entire issue devoted to creating a single service point, reference triage, and merging services across library divisions.

(via chat or voice call) or assist a patron with scheduling an appointment with the appropriate librarian. This allows the librarians or other staff to be working efficiently at their own desks (either in the library or remotely), rather than work inefficiently while stationed at an open service point where they may also be required to perform routine tasks – like replacing printer paper – which are more appropriate tasks for student workers.

Given the above recommendations (additional student support services in the library and consolidation of library service desks), FSU may want to consider repurposing the current Reference Desk space as a satellite or branch IT support help desk. In fact, librarians and staff indicated that a high percentage of in-person help requests they receive at the Reference Desk have to do with printing problems and other technology needs. Access to IT and technical help in the Hammond Campus Center would be a service enhancement for students and staff alike, given that the IT Help Desk is located on the other side of the quad.

Another topic raised in the report and by some stakeholders was the library's virtual space. There was concern from library staff about how difficult it is to find the library's website from the University home page, and also concern about what that positioning implies about the centrality of the library to the University's administration.

The library's web page itself is very visually appealing and easy to navigate, and finding general help is very intuitive. The pop-up chat feature is particularly helpful. However, trying to find out who the departmental liaisons wasn't intuitive. That information appeared to be buried under a top-level menu and nowhere else. The appointment-scheduling feature doesn't include the ability to choose by subject area, but by name only. Students and faculty would benefit by being able to see which librarians support which departments at the point at which they are making an appointment.

The library should also focus some more attention on the website's ADA compliance in order to make progress on the library's commitment to accessibility. One quick (and imperfect) way to quickly check a website's basic compliance is to use a website checker. For example, accessibilitychecker.org showed a score of 53 for the AGCL's home page on March 25, 2023, indicating that the home page had at least 5 critical issues that did not meet WCAG 2.1 level AA. Comparatively, several other peer university libraries (including Salem State and Framingham State) scored in the high 70s and low 80s on the same day. It's true that these automated tools are only one small indication of accessibility compliance and can only detect a small number of WCAG issues, so additional expertise and testing is needed. The library may be able to consult with the University's website and communications staff to conduct a WCAG 2.1 A, AA audit⁵.

7. Management/Administration/Leadership

The faculty who were consulted during the site visit reported that they have been very pleased with the leadership and direction of the library in the past several years. They view the library as having a “new openness and vibrancy” and that the library does a better job of communicating to faculty and participating in campus-wide initiatives than in the past.

⁵ See <https://www.ada.gov/resources/web-guidance/> for more information and for resources.

It was also very clear how much the library staff truly care about what's happening in the library and therefore want to be included as much as possible in planning its future directions. Some concerns were expressed about transparency and participation in decision making, with some observing that they feel there is sometimes inconsistency in how important issues are raised, discussed, and decided. For example, some librarians thought the self-study should have been more collaborative. Although they contributed significant feedback during the process, some said they didn't recognize as much of their own voices in the report as they'd hoped. Some staff also feel that not all staff have the "ear" of the library administration or get the same attention, and therefore, they do not have the same opportunities as others. A few staff expressed concerns about low-morale and feeling micromanaged. The staff want to feel they are trusted by library managers as well as university administrators. Prioritizing work around trust-building with the library staff would be beneficial.

8. Personnel

The AGCL staff, librarians, and administrators are accomplishing a remarkable breadth and depth of achievements with significantly limited time and money, due to their hard work, dedication, and commitment to excellence. The high quality and number of these accomplishments is particularly striking given the lack of adequate staffing and consequent overwork of the current staff. These challenges emerged repeatedly during the day's conversations. While staff and administrators are deeply involved in meaningful campus committee work and other important services to the University, some of them do so in addition to an atypically large number of essential duties and responsibilities in their daily library jobs. Meanwhile, the general perception by students and faculty is that the quality of library services is exemplary. This indicates that, in general, the staff, while finding ways to work efficiently, may also be working significantly overtime and at higher stress levels in order to maintain their service commitments. The library staff, including the library administration, are dependable, responsive, and engaged, but they often must bend over backwards to meet expectations and make it look easy. Everyone is working overtime to make sure that services to students and faculty don't suffer. Staff reported that they are "working at a pace that we can't sustain" and are constantly multitasking and double-booking meetings. It appears that the greatest single need for the library is additional full-time staff.

The library is particularly understaffed in the number of full-time, hourly staff positions that support public services, operations, archives, and security. The AGCL has only 2 full-time Library Assistants under a Public Services Operations Manager to staff/supervise the primary service point, the circulation desk. Peer institutions with a similar number of operational hours typically have 4 or more full-time Library Assistants reporting to an Access Services or Public Services Manager. Evening and weekend staffing is particularly precarious in that the job of staffing and closing the library at those times is delegated to part-time staff with little or no direct supervision. While part-time staff are highly responsible and capable, this practice puts a great deal of responsibility on the lowest paid and least experienced library workers. Maintaining regular access to the Archives is also a struggle with so few staff. In addition to growing the number of staff, the library may want to consider making the Archives by-appointment-only or significantly curtail the number of hours they are open for "drop-in" access.

Several librarians reported that they are “wearing multiple hats” and as a result, feel “burned out” and that they struggle to find the time to keep up with library trends and track new resources and databases for the benefit of the FSU community. In fact, the ratio of the number of librarians to students is much lower than other peer institutions. In addition, there are core areas of library specialty that are not covered by the specialties of the existing staff. The library would benefit greatly with at least one more tenure track librarian position, ideally at least two more to make up for these gaps. The positions that the librarians reported are the most desperately needed include a Collection Development and Assessment Librarian; a Scholarly Communications and/or Digital Archives Librarian; and an Online Instruction and/or Learning Librarian.

Another observation is that librarians don’t feel on equal footing with faculty or feel as well supported as faculty are in their scholarship. One small but meaningful thing to address this issue would be to include librarians’ profiles in the University’s online faculty profile tool with their education, job duties, research interests, and research output included. Inclusion in this public-facing site would contribute to clarifying the roles of librarians for the campus community as well as potentially boost the morale and confidence of librarians by showcasing their scholarly work on par with the faculty. The librarians, library administration, and university administration should work collaboratively to explore ways to best support librarians in their research and scholarly activities, including simplify the process for librarians to teach credit bearing courses, should they choose.

Additionally, librarians and staff should be given time to thoughtfully consider and draft revisions to their job descriptions. Job responsibilities should both meet the needs of the library and make best use of each employee’s skills. Without a critical and collaborative look at current responsibilities and clarification of duties, staff may lack the authority, autonomy, and support to succeed in their goals without experiencing frustration and stress, leading to burnout and/or critical staff vacancies.

9. External Relations

There appears to be a strong need to communicate the library’s services and resources more effectively, the library should continue to prioritize their goals to expand outreach – not only to faculty and students, but also the local community that the library serves – and to develop opportunities for users to communicate back to the library regarding those services and resources.