

2020

The Library at FIT

Realizing Our Information Potential

Executive Summary



Fashion Institute of Technology
State University of New York

STRATEGIC VISION

This plan projects an evolution of the library to meet new modalities of information access. There is a pressing need to engage in a closer partnership with faculty in the discovery and evaluation of resources across the full range of FIT's disciplines. There is a need to refocus and expand FIT's collections around resources of special meaning to the college's mission, including its role as a creative hub. As the library develops virtually and is transformed physically, there is a need to be guided by the principle of student centeredness.

A library should integrate information fluency within the college's teaching mission and provide an inviting place for discovery and learning. In proposing how these aims can be achieved, the strategic library plan directly addresses three goals from the college's strategic plan: to strengthen the academic core, to enhance FIT as a creative hub, and to commit to a culture of student centeredness.

It is with a sense of urgency, but also with a sense of opportunity, that we recommend this plan for the Library at FIT.

Strategic Challenge One:

THE LIBRARY'S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING THE ACADEMIC CORE

The FIT library is currently a scene of vibrant interaction with librarians helping students working on their class assignments. An observer might conclude that all is well. A student who requires help in researching a project finds her way to the E building and asks for and receives guidance in retrieving the resources and answers she needs. In the context of what has been termed an *explosion of knowledge*,¹ however, we must not ignore the scale of the challenge now facing the library.

The information landscape is evolving so rapidly that librarians must race to provide access. Faculty must master new research tools and recreate the curriculum for students who have grown up with the Internet, formed habits for answering questions that are at odds with older standards of information quality and trustworthiness. As if this were not enough, the increasing sophistication of our academic programs – because of changes in industry and in the college's growth in bachelors and graduate programs – constantly creates new demands.

The library's success as a participant in strengthening the academic core depends on its full integration into the teaching mission and realignment of its collection development policies with the changing needs of the college.

Integrate the Library into the Teaching Mission

The role of the librarians is to help students and faculty find their way through a dynamic information landscape. To succeed, a transformation of perspective is needed. Information-seeking expertise must be integrated into every department and every classroom. Success will be measured by the extent to which teaching faculty have mastered those skills and their abilities to convey them to students.

An alliance between the academic leaders and the library is needed to facilitate this transformation. All librarians and classroom teachers must become partners. They must find structures that will ensure that librarians and teachers have opportunities to collaborate. They must teach students the research techniques necessary to succeed in college and in the careers that follow by setting standards for effective research and critical thinking.

Align & Expand the Library's Collections

Realignment of collections to meet the needs of the College will similarly require moving forward on several measurable initiatives. We must ensure that the library's collections are capable of supporting the curricula of the academic programs and the teaching methods of the faculty. One way to do so is the ongoing engagement of library faculty and classroom faculty in conversations about libraries and learning. Another is to strengthen the library's budget for acquiring information. The annual collection development budget must be increased to a level appropriate for a SUNY four-year college.

¹ Zemsky, Robert, E-Learning: Successes and Failures, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Information Technology Section, January 5, 2007.

Strategic Challenge Two:

THE LIBRARY'S ROLE IN ENHANCING FIT AS A CREATIVE HUB

The library is vital to enhancing FIT's role as a creative hub for industry and scholarship. Fashion history is preserved in the more than 8,000 books, periodicals, illustrations and archives in the department of Special Collections, some of which date back to the seventeenth century. It is the library's obligation to preserve and protect these research collections, to extend and facilitate access to them in both their original physical formats and through digital representations, and to expand the collection with new acquisitions that make the college even stronger.

Protect & Improve Access to Unique Collections

The library loses opportunities to acquire important collections through purchase or donation due to inadequate space, storage conditions and security. Recently, the archive of a major illustrator whose work would have been appropriate for our collections was donated to another college. That archive was valued at \$300,000.

Despite the value of the holdings in Special Collections, its environment is well below recommended standards. The collections are deteriorating. Renovation will bring long-term benefits. An increase in available space will permit conservation work to be performed on site where it can be done securely and economically, reversing decades of neglect. A designated reading room, separate from the collections, will make them more secure, will provide a more comfortable environment for the reader, and will permit the stacks to be maintained at optimum temperature to slow the self-destructive action of acids in paper. The materials must be monitored by library staff and security cameras.

An inventory of holdings has been started. Completing the inventory and assessing the results are essential steps in preserving these resources. Once storage and security conditions are brought up to standard, new acquisitions can generate non-profit funding for further conservation and digitization.

Build Primary Collections for the Future

Rare publications, archival material and original illustrations will strengthen the college as a center for teaching, research and creativity. The department of Special Collections should have an acquisitions fund to purchase primary materials as they become available. The library can apply for public and private grants to fund some of these special acquisitions. A donor-relations program should be developed and become another source of funds when opportunities arise. The library and museum have opportunities to aid one another by identifying potential donors of materials appropriate to their respective collections.

Expand Digital Initiatives

The digitization of the library's unique and primary research collections remains an important initiative. It allows access to fragile materials while preserving them from handling. Thanks to the digital revolution, first championed at FIT by the library over a decade ago, it is now possible to extend access to some of the library's resources far beyond its walls. With the framework now in place, continued support for staffing and resources for the FIT Digital Image Library (FITDIL) project should be moved ahead more aggressively.

Promote Library Resources to FIT & Beyond

Although the library has been at the center of creativity at FIT, many students, faculty and staff are not fully aware of it. Some do not realize that the information on a museum label or an illustration in their textbook came from an original document in their own library. The library must reveal itself by heightening awareness of its role on campus and beyond. We can publicize the library by hosting special programs such as *Love Your Library Week*, reaching out through student activities, and creating a publications program to promote FIT's scholars and professional contributions to the field.

Reaching beyond the campus, the library will continue to serve the needs of the New York fashion and business communities through collaboration and creation of new opportunities from which both will benefit.

Strategic Challenge Three:

THE LIBRARY'S ROLE IN A CULTURE OF STUDENT CENTEREDNESS

The library is where resources reside to fuel the creativity of students and faculty in every program and department. It is where people come together to learn, interact and exchange ideas. The library has been the launching ground for countless research papers, design projects and business plans. It contributes to almost all the exhibitions of The Museum at FIT. Students and faculty gather in the library to learn and exchange ideas. It cultivates the intellectual commons in which scholars, writers, artists, thinkers, and the culturally curious may interact. This important library role requires a place for engagement and exchange, creating a milieu conducive to a chance encounter with a person or resource.

Services for a Student-Centered Library

The needs and preferences of students should be solicited, examined and used to shape new or improved library collections and services. A regular program of polling and focus groups will be developed to obtain student suggestions. The results will be incorporated into the library's decision-making process along with information obtained from academic schools.

The library collaborates with Institutional Research, the Instructional Computing Center, Student Life, and others to create library services for the students. We envision streamlined and effective communications with all areas of the campus and cooperative initiatives to provide optimal student services.

Revitalize & Renovate

While the work of the library goes on everywhere in the college, as a place, the library remains an important social, cultural, and intellectual hub. We need to embrace this role by providing a stimulating and technology-enhanced environment which is safe, accessible, flexible, functional, comfortable, and attractive. To improve the library's three floors we propose

beginning physical changes with "easy wins" to achieve immediate improvements. We will consider redesigning selected areas to be more appropriate to the study patterns of today's students and introducing new services that enhance the library experience.

Expand Virtual Services

The proliferation and consumption of information far exceeds the library's ability to contain it. As more services, resources and classes reside in electronic format, the library must find new ways to effectively provide access to information and support. The library has begun to respond to the challenge by creating the virtual space of the Digital Library. Our virtual presence, which facilitates access to texts and images, and introduces new services, should continue to develop and improve to meet and exceed college and research expectations.

FIT's Library of the Future

It is not too soon to start thinking about the library that is envisioned in the college's new Master Plan for capital improvements. We can safely predict that the next generation of students and faculty will have expectations that surprise us. The library faculty and staff, the Faculty Senate Library Committee and all who have a stake in a strong college should look forward to the new library. By pushing beyond the limits of what we have today, by exercising our creativity to make the library on floors four, five and six of building E the most exciting and relevant place we can, we are preparing to think boldly about the design of a new library that is truly at the heart of the college.

Strategic Challenge Four:

ESTABLISH PROCESSES FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT & PLAN REALIZATION

Assessment

The use of performance measures is not an end in itself; it is a means to improve operations and services and for reporting to various stake holders.² Library personnel must actively partake in assessment to gauge productivity as part of realizing this plan. Assessment will be the responsibility of committees designated to oversee various aspects of the plan. We envision diverse committees, including library personnel from all departments as well as the rest of the FIT community, to address the progress of the goals, further develop and identify strategies and create reporting mechanisms to provide progress updates to the administration.

Benchmarking, Job Descriptions, & Competencies

Benchmarking is the first and most important step for assessment. To accomplish this, we will need to establish comparative standards for library's organizational structure and space. Space and facilities will be benchmarked against the standards published by the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Art Libraries Society of North America and others.

The information age completely redefines the work done in libraries. The FIT library has not kept pace in reclassifying positions as needs evolved. Core competencies will be developed for our personnel and job descriptions will be updated to match the new realities of library work.

As we look at the organizational structures and workflow, new library models will be considered. Reengineering the structures, efficiencies in workflow and communications will translate directly to improvements to student and faculty services.

Putting the Plan to Work

The Library Strategic Plan offers an opportunity to address the library's most critical challenge - to provide the college with the services and resources to fully support its mission. The plan's matrix outlines initiatives and their strategies. It is a living document which includes short term and long term goals. Working committees will be formed to begin the plan's implementation.

Resources

While many of the initiatives may begin now, a second set is dependent on additional resources. The Institution will need to address the question of resources necessary for the library to bring the plan to fruition. Changes suggested to building E will require capital funds. Growth of the resources will require growth to the baseline budget. Reaching the average resource expenditure per students in SUNY four year colleges could be achieved by creating a long-term plan to find parity by 2020.

² Matthews, Joseph R., *Strategic Planning and Management for Library Managers*, 2005, pg. 111.

Committee Members

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