

2022-2023 Library and Information Collaboration Committee's Report (LICC)

March 20, 2023

Committee membership:

Daniel Cohen (CSSH, Vice Provost & Dean of the Library); David Smith, chair (Khoury); Monica Borgida (CPS/SOL, Undergraduate Programs); Angela Chang (DMSB, Marketing Group); Kelly Conn (CPS, Graduate Programs); Ron Willey (COE, Chemical Engineering).

Background to the Charge: The LICC consists of full-time faculty members from across the University who collectively utilize the range of Library/Information Collaboration resources and services. In addition, the Dean of the University Libraries/Vice Provost for Information Collaboration shall serve as an ex officio member. To facilitate continuity of policies and responsiveness to faculty needs with respect to information resources, delivery, and utilization across the University, the Committee shall establish continuing liaison with the Senate's Standing Academic Policy, Information Technology Policy, and Research Policy Oversight Committees.

Executive Summary: The Northeastern Library has successfully undertaken and continued major efforts this year in the Snell renovations, the integration of Mills Library, the updated online catalog, and the negotiation of read/publish agreements with publishers of journals that Northeastern University faculty members frequently publish in, such as Springer and Wiley. This committee proposes several areas where resources from the larger university could be productively invested:

- Digitizing materials from Mills Library's special collections to make them available for teaching and research by the wider Northeastern community;
- Gathering information on and coordinating the funds spent by various colleges on faculty publication charges to inform ongoing negotiations with publishers;
- Considering how the need for student study space on the Boston and Oakland campuses can be met by both the library and other buildings on campus.

Charge 1a: *Identify best practices for the Snell Library to connect with global campus library services, especially Mills college.*

Committee Response:

The Library performed very well over the last year integrating the Mills College Library into the Northeastern Library system. The committee discussed the integration both with Dean Cohen and with Janice Braun from the Mills College Library. All databases and catalogs

from Mills have been merged. The physical shelving, however, is still in Dewey Decimal, unlike Snell. For licensing purposes, Mills Library is no longer in the California Library Consortium but in the Boston Library Consortium. According to Ms. Braun, staff at Snell were extremely helpful throughout this integration process. Before the merger, Mills College had a required information literacy program for students, which might be an interesting experiment to revive.

Although the Mills Library is, according to Ms. Braun, “egregiously understaffed,” those issues have been alleviated more recently with the hiring of another reference librarian and an evening/weekend circulation manager. While Snell Library’s support for studying is a mainstay of student life on the Boston campus, Mills Library’s current staffing level cannot support 24-hour access. A major need at Mills College is group study spaces. The needs will become clearer as the next cohorts of students arrive. This echoes the needs of the Boston campus, which we discuss below.

As noted in last year’s LICC report, the Mills Library special collections are especially impressive, from incunabula (early printed books before 1500) to artists’ books of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to early work on digital music. Mills Library staff have continued to use this collection for teaching in-person classes in Oakland, but the collection has not been substantially digitized to extend its reach to Boston, London, and other campuses. Some staff at Mills do some digitization work in conjunction with their other duties, but there is a need for a processing archivist. Focusing on digitizing these special collections should be a priority for the University.

The London campus has its own Library needs, due to a different copyright and resource licensing environment in the UK. This sometimes means that Northeastern University London acquires its own materials, making a full integration with the main library administration and processes more complicated. Dean Cohen and the committee were looking forward to working more closely with the London staff to discuss these issues.

Resolution: Whereas over the past year the Northeastern University Library has achieved integration at the operations level with the Mills College Library; whereas the Mills Library’s special collections are a unique resource with value to the entire Northeastern community; and whereas Northeastern University has staff with world-class experience in library digitization; be it resolved that the Library should allocate resources and staff to digitizing important parts of Mills’ special collections to make them available for teaching and research.

Charge 1b: *Identify best practices for the library to communicate the role of librarians in supporting new and existing faculty.*

Committee Response:

After staff, the largest line in the Library’s budget is ongoing subscription fees to publishers. In tandem with these increasing fees to provide the Northeastern community to these publications, Northeastern faculty and staff have faced increasing charges to publish their work in many journals. Since publication in recognized venues is a requirement for tenure and promotion, publication fees (or “page charges”) are a consideration for the whole University’s ability to succeed at hiring and retention of faculty and staff and to train students for successful research careers. The increasing subscription fees for faculty, staff, and students to stay abreast of the literature in their fields have already been discussed as a global university issue, since disciplines differ greatly in the costs of their journals.

To address these rising costs, the Library has entered into transformative “read/publish” agreements with several publishers, notably Cambridge University Press and Wiley (for \$100,000/year). These read/publish agreements bundle the subscription costs and per-paper publishing costs into a flat fee calculated as a function of the number of FTE at the university and related factors. This relieves individual faculty members and their deans having to make calculations of the marginal cost of publishing their next paper and incentivizes better research practices. The largest remaining recipient of Northeastern’s subscription costs is Elsevier, whose annual charges continue to rise at an unsustainable pace.

Some deans and associate deans for research, according to Dean Cohen and our own communications with them, have been concerned about fees for faculty and staff to publish. Aggregating the concerns of ten schools into a university-wide policy would better inform the Library in its negotiations with publishers. From the scale of the problem and the importance to the University’s mission, we recommend that read/publish agreements be considered at the University level, potentially with additional financial support that would cover the transition.

Resolution: Whereas publishing research articles by faculty, staff, and students is a fundamental part of Northeastern’s mission; and whereas individual faculty and their deans have often paid for publishers’ publication charges out of their individual research funds; be it resolved that the University provost, deans, and librarian adopt a holistic approach to allocating funds for library subscription and publication costs and enter into flat-fee agreements whenever possible.

Charge 2: *Identify opportunities for the University community to support and amplify messaging related to ongoing library renovations.*

Committee Response:

Construction has been going well, with some earlier staffing issues of contractors being

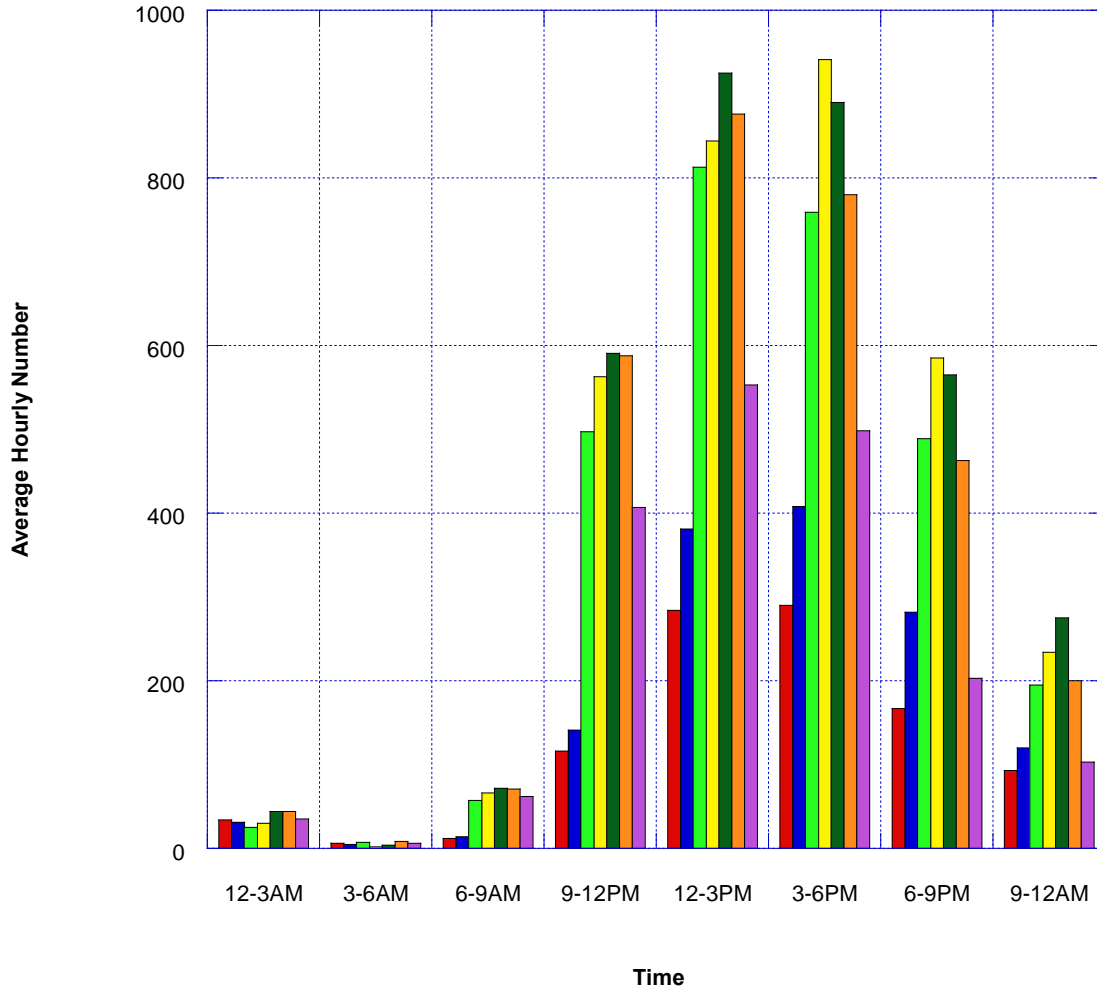
alleviated. Backlog of materials remains an issue, with some furniture orders having an 18-month lead time. A new version of the library website, with portals for each campus in the global network, has also been rolled out successfully.

Despite the ongoing renovations, Snell Library remains the most-used building on Northeastern's Boston campus. Depending on the spaces that have been closed during renovations, the Library has maintained between 1700 and 2300 seats. Over the past year, Snell Library has logged 2 million entries as counted by the front-door gates. It is instructive to compare this to Boston College's library, which, serving an on-campus student body of similar size, only recorded 700,000 entries over the same period. The figure below shows Snell entries from July 2019 to October 2022. Unsurprisingly, the times of highest library usage are between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m., with substantial entries until around 9 p.m. Exits, and thus occupancy times, are measured less precisely with radar, but the Library can still approximate aggregate numbers. Even at 3 a.m., the Library estimates an average occupancy of about 300 students.

The largest problem in library space allocation is a shortage of study space, which is really a university-wide issue. While the renovation will increase overall seating to 3100 seats, more quiet and group study space will be needed. Even after this increase, students may need to seek out additional study space in ISEC or, as it comes online, in EXP. There is a need for more non-bookable space so that students can be confident in finding locations to study. While the committee are confident that Snell will remain the hub of student studying at the Boston campus, we believe that allowing students to find study space is an issue that goes beyond the Library's mission and requires coordinated planning with the registrar and other units that allocate space on campus.



Library Usage Data - Number of People Working in the Library by Time



Resolution: Whereas Snell Library, as the hub of 24-hour student studying, is at capacity especially during its renovation; and whereas the availability of study spaces in other locations is distributed among different entities within the University; be it resolved that the Library, Registrar, and representatives from individual colleges coordinate on providing students with tools to find study space.