

External Service Area Review of UVic Libraries
May 30-31, 2024

Review Committee:

- Dr. Melissa Just, Chair, University of Southern California
- Dr. Eric Higgs, University of Victoria
- Dr. Susan Parker, University of British Columbia

Executive Summary

Few institutions at UVic have experienced more change more quickly than the Libraries. A mere decade ago a vast majority of students, staff, and faculty regarded the Libraries as an edifice of print materials. Today the UVic Libraries are the campus hub for learning and research. Students use the physical facilities for studying, collaboration, writing, fabrication, and research. Faculty and students interact with the Libraries virtually through accessible online repositories, search engines, full-text electronic resources, and support. The Libraries have embraced significant new initiatives including increased Indigenous work and engagement, digital preservation, and guidance for tectonic changes brought about by Generative AI and Large Language Models. It is a pan-university place—real and virtual—that binds together the UVic community. All of this speaks to a shift away from storage to service delivery as a primary mode. Still, the Libraries are a secure location for precious archives, rare books, comprehensive collections, and recently the University's art collections. We believe that if resourced and supported well in its transforming role that it would amplify the growth of the university and engagement with wider communities.

Further, we think the size of UVic and the configuration of the Libraries offers a distinctive opportunity. As a medium-sized university on a single campus it is easier to implement change than at larger universities with multiple campuses and libraries. The trajectory toward a 21st century library is already well in place at UVic. The UVic Libraries of the future is one that is a *hub* for the university, a central place open to all and supporting diverse, disciplinary and interdisciplinary learning and research. This is best exemplified by the recent development of Kula: Library Futures Academy. Over the period since the last external review, the Libraries have continued to deliver world-class and innovative services and resources. They are recognized among their peers (library members of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries, CARL) as leaders in digital preservation, digital scholarship, research data management, book arts and other experiential learning modalities, and Indigenization and decolonization.

During our site visit (May 30-31, 2024) we met with staff from UVic Libraries, including the Libraries executive, librarian heads, non-supervisory librarians, working group chairs, PEA, CUPE representatives, and Art Collections staff. Outside the UVic Libraries we consulted with senior leadership including several Associate Vice-Presidents, Deans, the Chief Information Officer, members of the Senate Committee on Libraries, and graduate and undergraduate students.

There are challenges we observed. For example, it will take significant and focused investment and further strong leadership to maintain robust financial support, overcome some of the limitations of the existing Mearns and McPherson facility (e.g., significant seismic infrastructure upgrades). The Libraries' new role as custodians and curators of UVic's extensive art collections has great potential but will take investment. The recent information technology (IT) consolidation raises concerns about the Libraries ability to continue to develop and support robust and unique digital services. Workload and change management themes emerged across the Libraries and need additional attention.

We present thirteen recommendations across six areas—1) Budget, 2) Library facilities, 3) Human resources and change management, 4) Indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, 5) Art collections integration, and 6) Information technology consolidation—for supporting and augmenting the present trajectory of the UVic Libraries.

Recommendations

General

1. Launch and invest in Kula: Library Futures Academy, which will further position the UVic Libraries as a national leader in realizing the 21st century academic library, while leveraging partnerships between the Libraries and the university's research and creative enterprise.
2. Focus additional effort and capacity on communicating and championing Libraries initiatives, services, and role broadly across campus. The UVic Libraries are central to the university, but understanding of the tools and services provided in the portfolio are not always widely appreciated.

Budget

1. While the university must adapt to shifting budget conditions, including contractions, more deliberate thought regarding the Libraries is recommended. Such an approach should ask the Libraries to deploy a smaller, more strategic, targeted, or more limited budget cut or revisions, as the Libraries must serve all units of the university.
2. The university should give the Libraries the ability to plan, develop, and secure funding with budget targets for short- and long-term planning. This will permit the Libraries to adjust current services and attend to underserved priority areas.
3. The university should invest in a dedicated development officer for the Libraries to support their fundraising priorities. The case for this is even clearer with the need to support the Art Collections and further the objectives of the Kula Academy.

Library Facilities

1. The Libraries should develop a comprehensive space plan that more equitably distributes library resources and services across the Mearns-McPherson and Law libraries; creates more defined spaces for different kinds of learning and engagement

(quiet, alone, shared, collaborative, creative); rightsizes spaces dedicated to collections and employees; and highlights unique, special, archival, and art collections.

Human Resources and Change Management

2. The Libraries should develop a hiring plan, or a personnel action plan that supports currently underserved priorities and that provides for future needs for change and growth, based on recent fiscal contraction, retirements, IT reorganization, the Kula Academy, and the Art Gallery and Collections. The Libraries should maintain organization charts that reflect the relationships of people and activities and organizes them in ways that highlight their function.
3. The Libraries should create a project to revise the entire working group structure. The project should establish a charter that includes assigned project leadership, a timeline, and required outputs.
4. The Libraries should create and publicize a catalogue of services focused on priority areas and incorporating the Art Collections and the Kula Academy. This should make it more clear to the community as well as to library employees what work and efforts the Libraries prioritizes, emphasizing staffing and engagement.
5. Archival processing overall is at risk due to budget constriction. Specifically, funds should be provided to hire an archivist for born-digital materials organization, visibility, and preservation.
6. Indigenization, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
7. Establish some level of formal commitment to action towards equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility as part of the next Libraries strategic plan.

Art Collections Integration

1. Conduct a full peer-comparison study of university art galleries to determine appropriate level of staffing and funding to ensure the Libraries and Art Collections are able to achieve the goals highlighted in the integration recommendations. Ensure sufficient funding is provided to support this important, visible, and high-potential merger.

Information Technology Consolidation

1. If it is not possible to reconsider the decision to consolidate Libraries IT staff with University Systems, protocols must be developed to ensure specialized software development and support for the Libraries are maintained and enhanced. Develop a shared understanding between the UVic Libraries and University Systems, and a commitment from University Systems, that secures robust ongoing support for innovative, responsive, experimental digital library services and resources.