

## RESETTING THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

A Plan of Action Submitted by Dr. Consuella Askew

### INTRODUCTION

The Rutgers University Libraries (RUL) recently experienced a transition of leadership. In the months leading up to the transition, several organizational assessments were implemented to better understand the workplace climate and the strengths and weaknesses. A faculty climate survey, staff climate survey and the Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) self-assessment were implemented over a three-month period. The overall results of these assessments indicated that while our commitment to service excellence is the Libraries' greatest strength, workplace climate for staff and faculty along with organizational leadership are opportunities for growth. In recent months, the Libraries have engaged in additional reflective activities such as listening sessions with the Interim Vice President for University Libraries and University Librarian (VPUL/UL) and a second EHE assessment exercise with all Libraries personnel following the previous session conducted with a limited group largely comprised of the Libraries leadership team.

During May and June, eleven listening sessions were conducted with the purpose to provide employees across the Libraries an opportunity to share their thoughts and suggestions about the Libraries' strengths, areas needing enhancement, and identify priorities directly with the VPUL/UL. The second iteration of the EHE framework was once again led by the Rutgers University Center for Organizational Leadership team. The results of these activities serve to validate the previous assessments emphasizing the need for the Libraries to focus on the following three areas: communications, organizational culture, and organizational clarity. These areas serve as the pillars of the following action plan that will be carried out by the interim VPUL/UL in the current fiscal year.

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### COMMUNICATIONS

Communications surfaced as an important area of concern for the Libraries personnel. The vertical and lateral communications flow within the organization, as well as outward to the Libraries' constituents were deemed critical. Libraries employees would like to see more communications focused on decision making in order to better understand the decision-making process or rationale behind the decisions made by the Library Administration that impacts our organization. Also voiced was the desire to see the VPUL/UL communicate and engage more frequently with the University administration and community on behalf of the RUL. They want a leader who wields their communications skills as an effective advocacy tool for the organization.

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### ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The listening sessions revealed an overall dissatisfaction and concern with the class structure that has developed across employee class, type, and rank over the years. Numerous examples were shared to illustrate the tenuous and troubled relationships between these groups of employees.

Further, frustrations were shared by staff about the lack of opportunities for upward mobility in the Libraries, professional development support, and most poignantly, the lack of recognition and acknowledgement for their talents, knowledge, skills and contributions resulting in the successful implementation of organizational projects.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CLARITY

In recent history, the Libraries’ identity as a singular unit as defined by University policy was obscured and the idea of our system being comprised of individual units—“One Library, four missions”—was adopted instead. Compounding this confusion of identity was the Libraries’ interpretation and implementation of the RCM budget model, which served in effect to further isolate units from each other. These two factors were seen as major deterrents for effective collaborative efforts across the units for the benefit of our University community, which was highly desired by all employees.

## ACTION PLAN

The interim VPUL/UL proposes the following plan of action to begin the process of responding to and addressing the aforementioned areas of communications, organizational culture, and organizational clarity during this fiscal year. Thought has been given to the order of scaffolded events detailed in this section. The information gleaned from each activity will be used to inform the next activity.

Host four convenings focused on the future of work in the Libraries.	Sept. 2021 – Jan. 2022
Establish a RUL Staff Advisory Body	Aug. 2021 – June 2022
Develop a mission statement for the Libraries	Jan.2022 – Feb. 2022
Identify an organizational structure responsive to the changing needs of our University	Mar. 2022 – May 2022

## CONVENINGS

The Libraries will host four convenings during the fall semester to promote forward thinking about post-pandemic Libraries. Taking place during fall 2021, these convenings will be a collaborative effort between the Office of the University Librarian and the RUL Faculty Planning Committee. The goal of these conversations is to surface thoughts, suggestions, and ideas for future direction, priorities, and organizational needs of the Libraries.

They will be focused on the areas of 1) collections; 2) services; 3) operations and staffing, and, 4) assessment. Each event will begin with a moderated panel session composed of library colleagues from peer and aspirational institution libraries that engaging in innovative activities and practices for each area of focus. Each panel session will be followed by a 60-minute conversation of RUL employees to surface future possibilities and priorities on the area of focus.

The thoughts and ideas resulting from these sessions will be used to inform the development of our mission and vision statement.

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## STAFF ADVISORY BODY

Responding to the feedback given by the Libraries personnel throughout the listening sessions conducted in May/June 2021, it became apparent that our staff and the University Librarian would benefit from having a more direct channel of communication. A staff advisory body (official name yet to be determined) will be instituted to serve as the counterpart to the Libraries' Faculty Planning committee and will amplify the staff voice. As a counterpart to the faculty governance body, this new entity will have representation on the Libraries Cabinet.

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## MISSION STATEMENT

It is clear from the listening sessions and the EHE conversations with the Libraries' personnel that we are experiencing an identity crisis. We have long been trying to reconcile and operationalize the concept of "one Library, four missions". This ideology has resulted in fragmented communications, the inability to clearly identify and articulate shared organizational priorities, and siloed operations across the system, all of which were mentioned repeatedly throughout the sessions.

In 2020, we successfully developed a shared set of principles and values that serve as the north star for our services, collections, and resources. Our current mission statement is not aligned with our principles and values and it no longer accurately reflects who we are – or, who we want to be. Our mission statement needs to be revisited and updated to align not only with our principles and values, but also President Holloway's vision for the University. The mission and vision along with our principles and values will serve as critical guideposts for our pathway forward.

The Libraries will engage external consultants to walk us through process of developing our new mission and vision statements that will clearly represent who we are, our goals and our aspirations.

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## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Our current organizational structure for the most part is aligned with how we have historically conducted our work. Over the years, our work has become more and more reliant on web-based technologies and we should shift accordingly. It was also evident that the working relationship between the Libraries central unit and its local units remains unclear.

The same consultants assisting us with developing our mission statement will also be engaged to conduct an organizational structure review that will be informed by the information collected and compiled from the previous activities and their own qualitative assessment. Deliverables for this component include an assessment of our current organizational structure and will provide feedback for structural changes that will enable the RU library system to successfully work towards accomplishing our strategic priorities as well as our aspirational goals.

## CONCLUSION

The above activities will collectively serve to establish a solid foundation for the Libraries that will enable us to chart a course of action for our future aspirations. The success of this plan and our organization

will be dependent on the full participation of the Libraries' employees. Let's work together to make RUL a highly collaborative, effective, and fully transparent workplace.