

To: Bob Blouin, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost
Kevin Guskiewicz, Chancellor

From: The Faculty Committee on Research, 15 October 2021

Cc: Mimi Chapman, Chair of the Faculty
Terry Magnuson, Vice Chancellor for Research
Joyce Tan, Vice Chancellor for Research
Elaine Westbrooks, Vice Provost for University Libraries and University Librarian
Gregory Copenhaver, Associate Dean for Research and Innovation

Re: Operational cuts to the University libraries

The Faculty Committee on research, whose charge is to “advise the chancellor, other officers of administration, and the Faculty Council on matters of University policy and its implementation that have significant impact upon research” (§ 4-16), feels compelled to respond to Provost Blouin and Vice Provost Elaine Westbrooks’ unexpected October 1 announcement of a \$2 million reduction to the libraries in the current fiscal year and an additional \$3 million in FY 22-23.

The library has experienced continual budget reductions over the past 20 years—a decade ago the collections were cut by \$4 million over a three-year period, the impacts of which we are still feeling today. The currently proposed \$5 million in cuts will have a profound effect on research, teaching and service to the State in yet unknowable ways for decades to come. The “cancellations of scholarly journals and databases and reduced purchasing of books and multimedia items” would be at this point, following a decade of budget reductions, crippling for a diversity of fields which depend not only on currently published material, data, and discourses but also on the curation of a cumulative discourse and historical bodies of knowledge transmitted in written form.

The emphasis on “research” in the University’s strategic plan (the “Discover” initiative of Carolina Next); the prominence of “Research and Discovery” in the University’s Quality Enhancement Plan and the IDEAs in Action Curriculum; and the proliferation of research-related administrative positions (e.g., Director of Research Curricula; Associate Dean for Undergraduate Research; Associate Dean for Research and Innovation) seem *fundamentally incongruous* with the proposed diminution of our libraries, which constitute the essential resource for all research, teaching, grant development, and public service programs and initiatives on and off campus—in laboratories, classrooms, clinics, fieldwork, centers, and the various research initiatives of Carolina Next.

Our identity, strength, and indeed long-term viability as a research university and the substance, quality, and impact of our research overall are directly dependent on the strength and effectiveness of our libraries. They are central to everything we do, but also critical to our research programs and teaching and service missions and vital for maintaining competitive graduate programs and conducting research of any kind. They should be preserved, maintained, and expanded, not reduced.

Any reduction in the scope and range of collections, and the effectiveness and efficiency of access will eventually and fundamentally change who we are as a university, while having long-term effects including hiring and retention, competitiveness and quality of graduate programs and research, our National Research Council ranking, and international research standing. It will also have a direct impact on the quality of our programs, the teaching of graduate and undergraduate students, and our mission of service to the State.

The library may be perceived to be a single administrative and budgetary unit in the University, just one of many subjected to defunding because of lack of adequate State support of the institution over the past decade. But the library is also the only unit on campus that is integral—intrinsically connected—to the function of every research and teaching unit, division, and department on campus, so it has to be thought of differently. Moreover, the library's unique inflationary expenditures thus need to be evaluated and assessed differently, perhaps uniquely, precisely because of the library's fundamental role in the identity and function of a research university.

In the University today, metrics of "success" are reductively expressed in research dollars (exceeding \$1 billion this year in new grants at UNC). These awards and expenditures (e.g., NIH, NSF, DHHS, and DoD), are indeed impressive, but do not reflect the full range, diversity, importance, or even long-term significance and impact of the work of countless units and divisions conducting research in the university. Although we can debate the definition of "research," the function of a "research university," the meaning of "success," or indeed priorities in allocations to research, we have not had these conversations at UNC, and even less with regard to our libraries.

Given the potential impacts of the current decision, what should be required now are faculty-wide discussions; exploration of possible revenue sources; an explanation of why we are making these cuts now and why other potential revenues are not being sought; and perhaps how we can make the hard argument to the State that the UNC Libraries require these expanding resources—that having a research university means that we need to increase annually the expenditures for the library.

We fully recognize the extreme difficulties the University faces responding to inflationary costs that seem incongruous with normative constancy in annual budgets and notions of fiscal austerity. But the answer is not to cut the library's budget by \$5 million at this moment, especially given the unusual strength of our state's surplus, as well as of UNC's enrollments, research funding and F&A, endowments, and investments. Furthermore, the process of making this decision has lacked transparency and the opportunity for faculty engagement and input which are the normal practices of shared governance. We would welcome such an opportunity to work with you on finding a way to preserve our libraries

In our efforts to be responsive to decisions of the University which directly affect research and scholarship and to advise the Vice Chancellor on issues of research infrastructure and support, we make the following statement:

The Faculty Committee on Research advises the Chancellor and Provost against pursuing a process of budget reduction with so little transparency and input from those of our community who will be most affected; to encourage open discussion among the university faculty and within Faculty Council so that we can understand the impact and immediate and long-term systemic effects of eliminating resources that are essential for conducting our research and teaching in the university; and to present and consider possible solutions.

Respectfully submitted,

Faculty Committee on Research