



MEMORANDUM

DATE: Friday, April 6, 2018

TO: Douglas J. Dempster, Dean, College of Fine Arts  
Lorraine J. Haricombe, Vice Provost and Director of Libraries

FROM: Maurie McInnis, Executive Vice President & Provost 

SUBJECT: Fine Arts Library

COPY: Gregory L. Fenves, President  
Steve D. Hoelscher, Chair, Faculty Council  
George D. Bittner, Chair, C7 University of Texas Libraries Committee

I have closely reviewed the Report of the Fine Arts Library (FAL) Task Force and carefully considered your recommendations. I have also reviewed the School of Design and Creative Technologies Facilities Task Force Report, as their findings are relevant in the context of the strategic planning of space and resources in the College of Fine Arts (COFA).

I would like to thank the FAL task force members for their thorough discussion of the important role that the FAL serves for our students, faculty and community members. The report clearly articulated the centrality of the having these scholarly resources close at hand for teaching and research. It also strongly argues for the importance of those resources being available in the heart of COFA. Clearly, the current location of the FAL continues to contribute significantly to the sense of community in COFA.

Faculty colleagues and students have also written to me directly. Concerned about the future of the FAL, they have passionately advocated for it to remain in its current location and suggested ways that we can improve upon shared decision making regarding issues related to the FAL. During a Faculty Council meeting I attended, I heard that some feel that changes made in the past to the fourth floor have also adversely impacted their ability to browse and access volumes. Additionally, Faculty Council delivered a resolution to me stating their position on this matter.

Of course, location was not the only item under consideration. Increasing student enrollment in COFA, declining circulation in the library, and budget and space constraints are also considerations that must be put into context. The task force presented a range of options in their report. On some of the items, more information may need to be gathered before taking action. On others, as you recommend, we can move forward in the near term. Following the recommendations from your memo dated Apr. 4, I am comfortable making the following decisions regarding the FAL.

1. I accept your recommendation to keep the Fine Arts Library collection on the fifth floor of the Doty Fine Arts Building (DFA).
2. As demonstrated by my recent approval of additional funding to reduce retrieval times for volumes stored off-site, I accept your recommendation to improve average retrieval times for any materials stored in other facilities.
3. I accept your recommendation to refurbish and renovate the fifth floor of DFA. I request that a plan be developed to help me understand the goals of such a renovation and the financial resources required. The plan should seek to address many of the concerns raised by the task force, including improving WiFi access, providing additional electrical outlets, modernizing the physical environment, and providing for both collaborative and private work spaces. In addition, I support your suggestion to increase shelving capacity.
4. I accept your recommendation to form a standing advisory council comprised of CoFA faculty, students, COFA academic support staff. The council should be co-chaired by designees of the dean of COFA and the vice provost and director of libraries. I believe this is a vital step moving forward to ensure that conversations about the FAL and its collections occur in a collaborative, productive and continuous manner.
5. In addition to your recommendations, the conversations about FAL have generated many questions about other constituent libraries at UT Austin. In order to ensure that we include faculty, students, and staff in these conversations about the future of libraries, I plan to form a university-wide task force. The future of academic libraries is a conversation taking place at leading research universities – public and private – across the nation. Academic libraries are an absolutely critical resource for the research and teaching missions of UT Austin. As we develop a strategic vision for UT Libraries, we need to be thoughtful about how we engage the campus community and solicit broad and inclusive input. My goal is to formally announce the charge and the membership of this task force in time to begin work in the fall 2018 semester.

While these decisions may not address all the concerns expressed, they do address many of the issues. Based on your recommendations, the new FAL advisory council can continue exploration of those issues raised in the task force report that require additional research. These new committees will inform how future partnerships across the campus community can be strengthened and help us strengthen community engagement and rebuild trust in the decision-making processes. It is imperative that we work together to create and improve productive, collaborative dialogue that results in a decision-making process that aligns with the needs of our communities and the strategic vision of libraries at the university. I have found immense value in the input of our students, faculty, staff, task force members and our administrative leaders. The fact so many are engaged in this process is a testament to the integrity and commitment of all involved.