

October 8, 2015

Dr. Mun Choi  
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Dear Provost Choi,

We are writing to protest against the dramatic cuts to the University of Connecticut Libraries in fiscal years 2015 and 2016. While deep changes in knowledge economies that have resulted from digitization may warrant a *reallocation* of library resources, what cannot be defended are cuts, which strike at the heart of the university's mission as a Research I institution. The decision to shear the most visible pillar of its research mandate so dramatically threatens to undermine the university's research profile and puts the university's ability to attract and retain top researchers and students at risk in the long term.

This policy is troubling on several fronts. First, these cuts have been implemented without either notifying or consulting with those most directly affected by it, namely the faculty. This reverses a practice of cost cutting from the ground up that has tended to prevail since the financial crisis of 2008, a policy that has tacitly recognized that the people who use the resources—the experts in each field—are also those uniquely qualified to understand what is dispensable. This policy has spared the University of Connecticut a lot of the institutional wreckage that has been the lot of other universities across the country. Until now, that is.

Second, there does not seem to be a systematic plan for reorganizing the library as a whole beyond frequency of use. This implicitly privileges undergraduate-level sources, for instance those assigned by professors or those that best condense knowledge to digest form. What is more, it cannot recognize that sources used infrequently may be those at the root of significant discoveries (i.e. in terms of the university's mission, one click by an expert may be worth hundreds of clicks by undergraduates). In other words, sources used often are not always the best sources, but rather those most convenient for quick searches. There is simply no way of getting around qualitative evaluations when making judgments about what a library should contain.

The quantitative logic being used suggests another important misunderstanding about the nature of academic research and of the role of a library within a research university. Dr. Hans Asperger's work on autism provides an interesting lesson on this score. Asperger had already modeled autism as a spectrum of disorders in the

1930s. When the work migrated to an American research group, the definition of autism ended up being circumscribed to correspond with Freudian theories of motherhood then in vogue. The result was a narrowing in the way cases were diagnosed in the US. A reevaluation of this approach may be one reason for the apparent surge in autism cases over the past three decades. Rediscovering Asperger's work helps us to better understand the nature of autism and it may also help us re-contextualize the autism crisis. It also reminds us about how research works more broadly, i.e. 1) knowledge is partly contingent, especially in terms of what gets stored and transmitted, discarded and suppressed; 2) it is shaped by intellectual fashions and by the assumptions of each generation; 3) the ability to return to past research has not only been an important spur for asking new questions, but also for apprehending how trends in knowledge have evolved or been derailed. This model of knowledge is reinitiated in the everyday business of research, but it is also the one we pass on to students, since an understanding of the traditions that have contributed to the formation of disciplines is often the gateway to producing cutting edge research. We relate this story to illustrate why an archive must be understood as a repository of possibilities and not just a collection of discrete items with a high frequency of circulation. Since knowledge is what the past hands to the future, and because we cannot know what will matter in years to come, the depth, breadth and a certain amount of redundancy in an archive are indispensable to its quality.

Third, this policy suggests a profound contradiction between the university's stated priorities as a Research 1 institution and its actual investment of resources. As it stands now, the holdings of the UConn library are barely adequate for a research institution. Although UConn ranks 57<sup>th</sup> in the US News and World Report overall, its library ranks 72<sup>nd</sup> in terms of the size of its holdings. Meanwhile, the libraries at public institutions that most closely rival UConn, those of the University of Maryland, the University of Washington, the University of Texas at Austin, and Ohio State do much better (59<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> respectively). UConn holdings only total 3.2 million volumes, while those of its closest rivals Maryland and the University of Washington total 4 million and 7.3 million respectively. Compare UConn to the nation's top public research institutions—the 12.9 million volumes at the University of Illinois, the 12.5 million at Berkeley, the 11.4 million at Michigan, the 10 million at the University of Texas—and the gap comes into even sharper perspective.<sup>1</sup> Other statistics are even more troubling. UConn spends by far the least per FTE student for its library when compared to rival institutions, only \$606.00. Our immediate peers, Maryland and Washington, spent \$856.00 and \$900.00 respectively. (The upper end of spending per student at public institutions ran closer to \$1500.00 at Michigan, UNC, and Virginia.) The least generous schools in our ranking cohort spent \$800.00; even Irvine, which can draw on the library resources of the entire University of California system, spent more, at \$710.00. We find the same pattern repeated for library staffing levels. As of 2012, well before the proposed layoffs, our university had only 5.18 staff members in its library per FTE student. This compares to

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<sup>1</sup> Figures from NCES library surveys

Maryland, 7.29, Washington, 9.92, and Irvine at 7.01, while UNC and Michigan each had 15 staff members per FTE student. Meanwhile over the past 10 years usage of the library has skyrocketed. The *weekly* gate count in 2006 was only 18,660; by 2012 it reached 53,288. The point of these numbers is to underscore that while better established libraries like those at the University of Washington or Ohio State (leave alone a Berkeley or a Michigan) might be able to weather retrenchments on the scale being contemplated here, our already insufficient libraries will be crippled—cut beyond the minimal threshold of functionality for a Research I institution. Despite the challenging budgetary environment across the nation, a survey conducted by the National Association of Research Libraries found that the vast majority of universities had either maintained or increased the funding of their libraries. In other words, most other research universities have shielded their libraries from cuts.

The scope to the problem we are facing can also be captured in terms of access. There are two ways to ensure library access: to own it or borrow it. If we are not going to attempt to keep building up our collections, the obvious solution is to expand Inter-Library Loan. Again national statistics are informative. Although the number of ILL loans provided by UConn to other institutions has held steady over the past decade at about 33,000 transactions per year, our borrowing has more than tripled, up from 21,000 loans in 2006 to 68,154 in 2012. In fact, UConn ranks 9<sup>th</sup> nationally for the intensity of its borrowing through ILL. This is a testament, on the one hand, to the poverty of our collections and, on the other, to the tremendous engagement of our research community. Given this state of affairs, we learned with particular concern that a position in the ILL has already been cut. Just as disturbing was the news that if a request through ILL were deemed too expensive, it would simply be refused. This puts researchers in an impossible bind. At the very least, a reduction in ILL creates barriers that inevitably slow down research even as demands for research productivity keep escalating. More importantly, however, when faculty and graduate students cannot follow up on important leads, they run the risk of being blind to what they don't know. This threatens the integrity of our research. What is more, we also run the risk of being cut out of vital conversations that are incubating right now and, with this, the ability to remain competitive for grants and talent.

Although the administration may not feel it has the funds to maintain 2014 levels of spending for the library, this is really a matter of spending priorities. Ironically, even as our library will be starved of 1.9 million dollars over the next two years, the number of administrators whose remit is to oversee research has mushroomed. Over the past ten years, a mere handful of research-designated posts has blossomed to over twenty positions including the office of the VP for Research, his 7 assistant or associate VPS; the office of the Assistant Vice Provost of Institutional Research; plus 15 Assistant or Associate Deans of Research. On average this group earned \$193, 796 in salary and costs the university almost 5.5 million in total compensation each year (or 11 million over two years). This new administrative population has emerged as part of a much broader expansion in the total size of the university's

administration, in our case a 60% increase in the number of positions, which is commensurate with national trends (see appendix for details). This year, acquisitions are being cut by a staggering *two thirds* across the humanities, social sciences and sciences. Next year, we are told, there will likely be *no budget* for book acquisitions and we may have to jettison big electronic packages like Wiley, Springer, and Elsevier. Thus while the university spends a fortune promoting and producing research, it is simultaneously saying that our institution will be cut out of the circuits through which that research is acquired and disseminated. In this context, it can only be described as galling to see that \$250,000.00 has been budgeted to retain outside counsel for upcoming salary negotiations with faculty (with an option to renew), when basic institutional resources are being cut past the bone.

It is laudable that the university is attempting to increase faculty diversity by recruiting prominent senior researchers. We wholeheartedly support this initiative. But how can the university reconcile what is clearly a bid to enrich the university's research profile when it undercuts the very means to carry out that research? And what are we supposed to tell these researchers when they ask—inevitably—about library resources and this university's support for research?

We work in an information economy and this is a Research I university. It is with our obligation to protect the University of Connecticut's long-term research mission in mind that we respectfully request that the library be protected from any further cuts.

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Appendix: In 2005 the university housed only 4 VPs and only 2 Associate or Assistant VPS alongside the president. We now have 8 VPs and 14 Assistant or Associate VPs. In 2005 there were 4 Vice-Provosts and 12 Associate and Assistant Vice-Provosts, now there are 7 Vice Provosts and 6 Assistant Vice Provosts. In 2005 there were 15 Deans and 26 Assistant or Associate Deans, now there are 13 Deans and 53 Assistant and Associate Deans.

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