January 15, 2009

Paula Kaufman
Dean and University Librarian
230 Library
MC 522

Dear Paula,

Thank you for the recent update on the activities associated with the Library’s “New Service Models” program. I appreciate the ongoing efforts by you and the faculty and staff of the Library to plan for the future of the University Library in an open, inclusive, and creative way. The announcements you shared regarding the future of the Library & Information Science Library and the Scholarly Commons demonstrate that, even in difficult economic times, we can make good decisions about how best to invest our resources to ensure that the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign will continue to be a leader in research library services for the twenty-first century, as it was for the twentieth.

Although I appreciate and commend the efforts you have made, I must ask if there is more that can be done to meet my earlier challenge to envision a sustainable vision of library services for the future. The “Final Report” of your Budget Group Plus outlined a number of potential changes that would both improve library services to Illinois faculty and students, and encourage economies of scale and effort. Those economies were forward looking in 2008, but they are a necessity in 2009. Given the scope of the financial challenges facing the University, the State of Illinois, and the nation, I must ask you to consider how to move more quickly into a new service infrastructure that will allow us to protect our core commitments to library collections and services while also allowing us to make the best possible use of our financial, physical, and human resources.

To this end, I ask that you immediately expand your work to integrate library collections and service points in a way that will allow the greatest economies of scale, while also recognizing the need to support an array of library services that are appropriate to the needs of different populations and disciplinary communities. I believe that these changes are in the best interests of our faculty and students, but also that these changes will allow you to better serve and protect our commitment to faculty, staff, and student positions in a way that will be more difficult if we cling to our traditional, highly-decentralized model of library facilities, collections, and services.
In addition to the recommendations outlined in the “Final Report,” I ask you to make even bolder changes. I ask that you integrate the Physics and Astronomy, and Geology libraries with the Grainger Engineering Library to create a center for library services and collections in the physical sciences and engineering disciplines, and consider the possibility of integrating the Chemistry and Mathematics libraries in this facility as well. I ask that you take a similar approach to the ACES Library, and integrate within that facility our Biology, Applied Health Sciences, and Veterinary Medicine libraries in order to create a center for library services and collections in the life and health sciences. Finally, even in the absence of a full-scale renovation of the Main Library in the near future, I ask that you move forward immediately on the establishment of the interdisciplinary service programs you have outlined for Main in the social sciences, the area studies, and the humanities. Building on the early discussions you have had with John Unsworth on the complementary work of the Illinois Informatics Institute, I ask that you continue to explore options for bringing allied academic programs into the Library in order to support campus-wide initiatives such as IT @ Illinois and our e-science initiatives. The Library is an essential feature of our scholarly infrastructure, including the cyberinfrastructure, and I encourage you to continue fostering partnerships among complementary programs that will ensure that the Library remains at the heart of scholarship at Illinois.

You will understand, I am sure, that the current economic situation and the outlook for the future necessitate that we take bold steps such as these to protect our investment in the University Library. We all want to ensure that its future as a leading research library and a unique resource for our faculty and students is sustainable in these early decades of the 21st century. I ask that you prepare an action plan by April 30, 2009 that addresses these suggestions as well as the recommendations you presented to the campus last year. I recognize that library materials must be reviewed before they can be moved. I also recognize that as you develop these new services for library facilities, some renovation will be required to enable their support. Still, I ask for this action plan to be aggressive and to outline substantial changes to our current operations that can be made to affect savings as early as the upcoming fiscal year. To do any less will jeopardize our faculty, our staff, our students, and our library. I look forward to talking with you about how you will proceed and to seeing this plan later this Spring.

Sincerely,

Linda Katehi
Provost and Vice Chancellor
for Academic Affairs