Minutes of the meeting of the New Service Models Literatures and Languages Planning Team, 11 November 2009.

Present: Robert Cagle, Dara Goldman, JoAnn Jacoby (Administrative Liaison), Doug Kibbee, Carl Niekerk, Curtis Perry, Bruce Swann, Caroline Szylowicz, John Wagstaff (Chair), Charles Wright

The meeting began at 10:00am with a tour of spaces under consideration for a combined English and Modern Languages Library (under a name to be determined), should the Team decide to recommend a merger: Room 225 (currently the Slavic Library), Room 200d (Government Documents), and an adjacent section of Room 200 (Main Reference). This combination of spaces represents a modification of a plan proposed in 2005 by English librarian Kathleen Kluegel and former Modern Languages librarian Tom Kilton, who called for a new Language and Culture Library and Commons to be housed in the current Main Reference Room (200). [Their proposals, dated March 2005 and September 2005, are available on the LLPT website.] Because Library Administration has now stated that 200 will continue to be used for general Reference collections, but has also left open the possibility that some part of it could be dedicated to a combined English/Modern Languages Reference collection, the Team in its meeting of 4 November had discussed whether combining some part of 200 with 200d and 225 could make for a viable alternative to the Kluegel/Kilton plan. Subsequent to that meeting, Kathleen Kluegel (who could not be present at today’s meeting) communicated to the Team by email her view that these combined spaces would be adequate, assuming that there is no major weight-bearing deficit in comparison to Room 200. JoAnn Jacoby noted that the weight-bearing capacity of 225 is the same as that of the current English Library.

The Team discussed possible configurations of each room, including where different kinds of collections (reference, circulating books, and periodicals) might be shelved and where other services, equipment, and furnishings (e.g., the circulation desk, meeting and instruction space, computer stations, microfilm/microfiche readers, and tables for study) might be accommodated. Part of Room 200 adjacent to Government Documents could be used for the combined Reference collections of the two libraries, which would involve a net reduction in materials by eliminating duplications (notably the foreign languages dictionaries currently held in both Modern Languages and Main Reference). Caroline Szylowicz noted that some other reference materials currently held in 200 will be moved to the new retrospective Reference collection in the fifth floor of Main Stacks. It was also noted that additional space can be saved by transferring to Oak Street back-issues of periodicals that are available online. Room 200d, which had originally been designed as a periodicals room and still has the wooden perimeter shelving installed for that purpose, could easily be converted into a current periodicals room. JoAnn Jacoby noted that 200d was under Heritage protection, but suggested that the wooden doorway and wall separating it from 200 could be moved further out, just beyond the door leading to Room 225. Room 225 could then become the main room for the merged circulating collections, and could be reconfigured and refurnished as required. The Team also discussed where the main entrance to a new merged library might best be located, where office space for staff might be located, and how the current conference room within
Room 225 (which is reservable as an instructional space through Library Facilities) might be used.

The rest of the meeting was held in the English Library. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved, and it was agreed that a .pdf file of the Team’s survey would be added to the Team’s website. John Wagstaff brought up the disposition of the Kolb-Proust archive: would it be incorporated into a merged English and Modern Languages Library, or remain separate? Curtis Perry noted that some English faculty have expressed concerns about a merger of the two unit libraries if it resulted in a net loss of available space for collections. Charles Wright agreed that a merger would be viable only if the space was adequate.

Discussion first focused on how the collections of a merged unit library would be articulated in relation to the collections in Main Stacks and Oak Street, and on how long-term planning for both on- and off-site storage of collections might affect the capacity of a merged unit library. Robert Cagle stated that faculty best understand their own research needs, and that large-scale reconfigurations of collection spaces initiated by Library administration risked dictating the kinds of research that are possible. John Wagstaff noted that the Team had affirmed the importance of maintaining extensive browsable print collections, but that it was necessary to work with the finite space we have in order to maximize its capacity and usage. He added that, contingent upon funding, as many as three additional modules are planned at Oak Street, and that a Reading Room might be added for on-site consultation, although since the materials at Oak Street are shelved by size, they are not and will not be available for browsing. There was also discussion of how materials are designated for transfer from unit libraries to Main Stacks, and from the Main Library (both unit libraries and Stacks) to Oak Street. John Wagstaff noted that economics of Oak Street depend on no more than 3% of the materials located there being requested per year – more than that and the cost of retrieval and transport are too high, but that faculty can request that specific books sent to Oak Street be permanently returned to the Main Library. Caroline Szylowicz pointed out that unit libraries often cannot transfer materials to Stacks when they wish to because of insufficient space there. In response to a question from Charles Wright, JoAnn Jacoby explained that the Main Stacks cannot be made compliant with code requirements, or made environmentally friendly for books, so will ultimately (within about 20 years) have to be replaced. Long range plans for the Main and Undergraduate Library, as currently envisioned, would have open stacks throughout the building with a capacity of up to 3 million volumes (if compact shelving is used) and one closed (Automated Storage and Retrieval, similar to the one University of Chicago is building). The high-density Stacks would enable “mediated browsing” by allowing patrons to request an entire bin or rack, and this would be supplemented by emerging forms of digital browsing. Caroline Szylowicz suggested that Tom Teper, Associate University Librarian for Collections, be invited to attend the Team’s meeting of 18 November to inform the Team in more detail about long-term plans for the Main Stacks and Oak Street. The current system of recalling checked-out books and ordering books through I-Share was discussed as well.

Discussion then returned to the spaces being considered for a possible merger of English
and Modern Languages. It was agreed that the combined spaces of Rooms 225, 200d, and part of Room 200 are potentially adequate and indeed attractive, but that the main drawback is their lack of adequate private office-space for library staff. Caroline Szyłowicz and Robert Cagle reported on the office space available in the current English and Modern Languages libraries. Comparable office space would have to be constructed within 225 (which currently has just one private office) unless some adjacent or nearby office space were made available. A suite of offices in Room 227, across the hall from the main entrance to Room 225 and currently occupied by Library Advancement, might be ideal. Dara Goldman stated that it was important to preserve the assets of the two current unit libraries (robust collections, expert staffing), but that the new space under consideration had the potential of affording a more welcoming communal space for faculty and graduate students across the various departments and disciplines served by the libraries.

John Wagstaff concluded the meeting at 11:30 by stating that the Team’s next meeting (18 November) would have to focus specifically on the practical questions involved in configuring the combined spaces of Rooms 225/200d/200 for a merged English/Modern Languages library. He encouraged Team members to continue communicating with their constituencies and other stakeholders in this process.