Notes from Meeting with Paul Garber, Interim Head, Department of Anthropology
16 November 2010
(Attending from Library: JoAnn Jacoby, Beth Sandore)

Professor Garber noted at the beginning of the meeting that he recognizes and supports the Library’s effort to consolidate libraries and library services around the social, behavioral, and applied health sciences disciplines. He noted that for the Anthropology department, the ways in which faculty and students use the Library and its services are changing. He noted the example of the Oscar Lewis reading room, which was maintained by the department until around 2002, but was closed down, largely due to the availability of online journals and other resources.

Professor Garber noted that faculty in Anthropology do research and teach within and across a great breadth of areas— in the humanities, social sciences, and life sciences. The planning to consolidate Library services across the social, behavioral, and applied health sciences fits well with the great breadth of sub-disciplines and interdisciplinary work in which researchers who are in anthropology are now engaged. Further, he indicated that having the ability to gain access to Library expertise across these disciplines in a cohesive Library environment will become increasingly important to research in the areas covered by anthropology.

The intellectual synergies between Anthropology and the other disciplines represented in the SAHS planning effort are numerous from Garber’s perspective. Addressing the benefits and disadvantages of bringing together business, applied health and the social sciences, Garber noted that he thought this would be advantageous. Anthropology already benefits from being served by a library spanning much of the social sciences. Economics would be relevant to the work of many from the department whose work examines economic issues in the U.S. and in other areas in the world. The anthropology department includes a strong biological component whose work is related to health, human biology and genetics. They are developing a major focusing on human biology and teach all of the human anatomy classes for the College of Medicine. On the social science side, many of their faculty members perform research that touches upon issues related to health and community wellness from a cultural perspective, and they have talked about hiring a cultural anthropologist who specializes in medical anthropology.

Professor Garber suggested that undergraduate students need more orientations to Library resources and services, in particular at the points in their work when they had assignments in which they needed to use Library resources to become more familiar with the research process, and to identify vetted and recommended resources within their fields of study. He observed that students seek convenient online access to resources, often through Google, noting that the Library plays an important role in teaching students (both graduate and undergraduate) the method and value of critical evaluation of resources to support their research. He encouraged the Library to push out information on a more frequent and regular basis to the department—in Professor Garber’s words—“bug us more.” He believes
the significant value of Library services to anthropology is having access to one or more librarians who consult with faculty in the department, attend faculty meetings, and interact with faculty regarding their research and teaching needs that can be supported by the Library. Professor Garber expressed strong interest in seeing the Library develop online search and discovery tools that are tailored to the research needs of social scientists, working on the model of the Easy Search Library search engine. He also talked about the importance of e-resources, including journals and more recently, e-books. He noted that acquisition of e-books seemed to be an area where Illinois appears to be ahead of peer institutions.

Faculty and grad students are increasingly involved in cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary work. When working outside one's core area of expertise, one-on-one consultations with librarians serve the important role of helping to identify key, vetted journals and other publications in a new and unfamiliar research area. Bringing together a larger group of librarians with different specialties would help support this sort of boundary-crossing research.

Professor Garber emphasized the point that “visibility is important.” He encouraged the Library to use thoughtful and effective communication to push information and opportunities out to researchers—not to wait for faculty to reach out to or come physically to the Library.

He extended an invitation to attend the December 2 faculty meeting for a brief presentation and conversation with the Anthropology faculty.