Dear Dean Stewart and members of the Library Executive Committee,

First, thank you to Dean Stewart for hosting the library-wide meeting on the library reorg on Wednesday, May 13. That conversation, while difficult, we think was ultimately important. Additionally, we greatly appreciate the letter sent to all employees regarding follow-up to that meeting, and the opportunities you are setting up through EC and library-wide for continued further discussion, and we hope these can be fruitful.

As faculty (and professionals of all ranks), most of us spend our careers here and weather the long-term impacts of decisions that are made. Strong adherence to and use of official governance procedures in combination with other governance mechanisms are crucial to fostering positive change even when people disagree, and by extension ensuring our continuation of excellent service. The lead we have over peer institutions in satisfaction with the library that you have cited in other contexts does not just come from our excellent collections and day-to-day expertise; it comes from the hard work people have put into contributing to strategic directions and policy recommendations and generally providing leadership at all levels.

We think it's important to continue to address circumstances that lead to breakdowns in trust from both sides. From our perspective, some of this is due to governance processes not being observed in ways that maximize their utility and transparency. We'll note that some of the causes for this are not new and are not any single person's responsibility. We also do not mean to imply that official governance processes are the only way for the Dean to receive input: indeed, we applaud any efforts to gather feedback as broadly as possible and in targeted ways from individuals whose expertise, experience, or other credentials are likely to provide important contributions. Governance processes outlined in the statutes and bylaws typically indicate a minimum and necessary approach, not the only approach. The Ikenberry letter, recently mentioned numerous times to highlight the ultimate authority of the Dean, also in several places indicates the importance of mutual collaboration and shared governance, and to that end it highlights one place the faculty does have authority and responsibility: "the right to organize itself for all these responsibilities and for the purpose of advising the University Librarian on matters affecting the operation of library services."

In keeping with the bylaws and in order to improve transparency and trust as well as mechanisms for input, we'd like to suggest the following:

1) Faculty meetings: We very much agree with the suggestion in the library-wide meeting to return to regular faculty meetings at the frequency specified in the bylaws ("approximately monthly"—although we respect that historically a couple of

months were skipped to allow for a slower summer pace). The original rationale for the cut back discussed in EC with the previous Dean no longer applies, and indeed the timing of the decision—when many COVID precautions were still in place and major activities had not regained full steam—means that there were fewer items to discuss. Recent agendas have been full and even lacking adequate time, and there is clearly no shortage of items for discussion, including a lot of things that are faculty issues. We can easily imagine filling a full slate of meetings with bylaws issues in the coming year, given their range and scope.

2) Ensure the regularity of EC meetings and that EC is being used in ways that fulfill bylaws requirements. We are encouraged by the library-wide email promising a "regular cadence" after the Memorial Day holiday. Regarding EC and related obligations, generally, we would note that none of us are currently on the Executive Committee and so do not have full insight into why any of the following are the case, but without clarity on the reason these tend raise cause for concern more than not:
    a. Regularity of EC meetings and cancelations: the bylaws (V.5.B) specify these should be at least bi-weekly, and that there should be mutual agreement on cancelation. Historically, EC met three times a month (1^{st}, 2^{nd}, and 4^{th} Mondays) in order to set monthly schedules but err on the side of additional meetings. The current approach (at best twice monthly, often only once) does not meet the "biweekly" standard, with an alarmingly low number of meetings in the past year. If the Dean's travel schedule means cancelations are relatively likely compared to years prior to COVID, then the 3-times monthly plan may be a better approach to guard against missed meetings. Related, those of us previously on EC recall that email should usually not be used to conduct EC business outside urgent needs (often advice on personnel issues, but not always). It is important that topics of discussion be reflected in minutes of actual meetings to ensure transparency on what EC has and has not been consulted about. It is hard to know if this is happening, but the extremely low number of meetings compared the level of activity happening at the library suggests either that it is, or that EC is not being consulted in the way it should be.
    b. On the issue of minutes: it is imperative that these are distributed regularly to meet minimal transparency—earlier this year we had a half year gap, and more recently we were building up another that was just filled. While minutes don't and often can't reflect the entirety of discussion, they should reflect topics and formal advice to the Dean (except on personnel issues as per bylaws V.5.D or truly confidential items). Especially because EC is an elected body advising the Dean on behalf of the faculty, it is important to make sure it

is clear how EC is advising the Dean, and whether that advice is unanimous. This transparency assures the broader faculty that EC, whose members were elected in good faith, is fulfilling its obligation to represent the faculty in EC's advice to the Dean. Typical best practice for reflection of advice on key recommendations is a vote (not on the action, but on the advice), or a clear statement when there is not consensus or if there is an abstention.

c. Related to this, meeting documents and reports are supplementary to the minutes, and none have been listed or shared since September 2023. This is particularly concerning as it should be a fundamental baseline of transparency that faculty are able to see the reports or other documents provided to inform the Dean. Bylaws section VII.1.B.3 requires creation and sharing charges of all appointed committees after discussion with EC, and VII.2.D specifically calls out the obligation for sharing committee reports except in cases of personnel or other narrowly defined confidential issues. The faculty have an inherent interest in understanding how delegated committees are advising EC and the Dean, and then to see the outcome via the minutes as to whether the recommendations (when part of the report) are taken or not, or some mix of the two, or the report tabled entirely. If there are significant departures from recommendations, there are likely to be questions at faculty meetings if not actively addressed by the Dean (as required by Provost's Comm #27, section 3, final bullet), but this should be treated as normal and simply a part of good governance and transparency in decision-making, not a challenge to the Dean's authority to make decisions that depart from received advice.

d. It is important that EC be consulted on faculty appointments, reappointments, and non-reappointments as described in the statutes (III.2.f), and this is especially true in the appointment of unit heads filled internally, interim appointments to those positions, or other appointments that do not receive a formal search. The committee has confidentiality mechanisms as noted above to ensure such discussions maintain the necessary level of privacy.

3) For EC transitions in August, begin a new practice for onboarding new EC members that involves asking all EC members from the past few cycles (4-5 years would not be exorbitant given overlap) to join for an informal session to discuss best practices and existing EC procedures. Those of us who have been on EC in the past would note that transitions such as this have often left major gaps, especially for individuals new to EC. This has at times led to erosion of best practices and other typical knowledge management problems that organizations suffer.

4) Take care to observe that authority and responsibility for the bylaws does rest with the faculty, and not muddy the division of administration and governance. Per the Ikenberry quote and across the university, it is a right of the faculty to decide its governance procedures, and the faculty ultimately must vote on changes. Refusing to observe how the faculty has already “organize[d] itself for all these responsibilities and for the purpose of advising the University Librarian on matters affecting the operation of library services” will erode trust in the belief that the Dean will observe any future changes to bylaws, or any form of governance, in good faith. Having the Dean chair the current working group tracking shared governance issues already blurs this line in ways that are unexpected and troubling. Ultimately, the faculty must take the lead on deciding how it wants to be consulted—not be told by the Dean how it should want to be consulted. We understand the logistical challenges of governance and that it can be frustratingly slow, but those are not acceptable reasons to sideline it, and the price paid for expediency will be a further erosion of trust, morale, and faith in the future of the Library. This is not the future we want or the campus needs.

Again, we greatly appreciate the May 13 meeting and follow up. We don't intend for this letter to diminish the value of the adjustments made after that meeting already, but we see them as the beginning of harder work ahead. In the spirit of further improving trust, we would be happy to have a few members of the signatories below join a future EC meeting to discuss these concerns. We hope this is the beginning of a shift to more inclusive and transparent consultation with the faculty and the library as a whole, and offer these suggestions in the spirit of improving trust and morale generally.

Sincerely,

Cait Coker
Amy Fry
Heidi Imker
Erin Kerby
Mary Schlembach
Janis Shearer
Wendy Shelburne
Ayla Stein Kenfield
Caroline Szylowicz
Daniel Tracy
Kelli Trei
Cherie’ Weible