University Library Committee Report
Unanimously endorsed, January 22, 2014

1. When matters critical to the basic research and teaching mission of the faculty arise, it is imperative that faculty governance be alerted and its intervention solicited. That is why we come forward with this report.

2. There is a problem in Fondren Library’s capacity to fulfill its function in materials acquisition and access for research and for teaching that has reached crisis proportions and needs immediate budgetary attention.1 This problem will of course be brought to the attention of the budgetary officers of the university by the library administration in the regular budget process. But the character and the scope of the problem leads us to believe it appropriate for the faculty to intervene and express its support for prioritizing this funding matter. This is not to disregard the limits of university resources or the worthiness of many other funding needs that will come under consideration at the university level. It is to stress the urgency of this priority at this moment for the basic function of the university.

3. The problem of materials acquisition cannot be temporalized. Failure to maintain collections and access will cause irreversible damage to the research and to the teaching efficacy of the university. It is this which makes the current situation truly critical. We face just this sort of irreversible damage in the immediate term if we do not take action.2 That is what we wish to make clear.

4. The natural response of responsible budgetary officers will be that the library should first seek to redirect existing funds in its overall budget to maximize its capacities for materials acquisition and access. The fact is, the library has already done all it can in this regard. We can demonstrate this both by reference to internal operating budgets and by reference to our peer institutions. If anything, this evidence demonstrates how rigorously the library has already tightened its operating budget to maximize materials acquisitions and how this has not been enough to keep pace either with rising costs or peer institution responses. Compared with peer institutions, Fondren is running with a very lean staff and a much higher commitment to materials acquisition from its overall budget than any of its peers.3 There is no sense to a budgetary response that asks the library to cope with the crisis using its existing resources. The university must take a proactive role in resolving the crisis. And that means more money and more money now.

5. The library staff calculates that it will need a one-time increment in budget of $600K to stabilize its materials acquisition capacity, and this will need to be supplemented in subsequent

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1 See accompanying slide presentation for evidence (esp. slides 3-4, 7-9).

2 See accompanying slide presentation for evidence (esp. slides 13-16).

3 See accompanying slide presentation for evidence (esp. slides 5-6, 19).
years at the level of current inflation in this field – between 5 and 6 percent annually. To restore our previous materials acquisition capacity, rather than simply stop the downward spiral, would entail an immediate commitment of $900K and a proportional percentage supplement in annual budgets going forward. We recognize that even the stabilization amount is sizable and the restoration amount clearly more so. But we urge that the university do its utmost to rectify this situation. The alternative, as we will demonstrate, is dire.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chair, University Library Committee, 2013-2014