An external review of the Folke Bernadotte Memorial Library occurred during the spring semester of 2013. Megan Fitch of Beloit College and Diane Graves of Trinity University spent two days on campus interviewing library faculty and staff and conducting discussion sessions designed by the librarians around several questions of interest to our department, the College and our profession. The reviewers interviewed Gustavus students, members of the faculty and members of the college administration. Prior to their visit, Fitch and Graves received a self-study compiled by Barbara Fister that gives an excellent overview of the library academic program, as well as information on the physical library, and the state of our collections, budgets and planning initiatives.

The reviewers submitted a written report and a subsequent addendum at the end of the academic year. These documents formed the basis of discussions at the library all-staff and library faculty meetings throughout the fall semester. The following is the Library response to the entire review. After an initial section of reactions to the “Strengths” components of the review document, the response is focused on the “Challenges” components and is organized according to the same outline found in the Fitch-Graves reports. There are sections on Organization (Staffing), Budget, Student Learning and Instruction, Physical and Virtual Environments, and the two addendum questions. A significant portion of the Fitch-Graves report deals with campus issues and climate outside of the Library’s direct responsibility. We consider those parts as being for our general advisement and will not address particular responses to those comments. It is important to note that this response is further informed by events which have occurred during the 2013-14 academic year, following the visit and receipt of the report.

General reactions:

- We appreciate and celebrate the strengths that the reviewers identified. The library faculty and staff are described as dedicated and highly regarded. As the reviewers indicate, many staff members perform (for less salary) work done by degreed librarians at other institutions.

- Although our collections budget is not consonant with the aspirations of the College, we are pleased that faculty in other departments and our reviewers recognize the time, effort and creativity employed to get the most out of that budget.

- The Gustavus Library had been described by our predecessors as a teaching library long before any of the present faculty or staff began employment at the College. We are proud to have built upon that tradition and continue to develop a high-quality instruction program. Consistent with changing perspectives within the profession, we seek new opportunities for improved instruction within our department as well as opportunities to contribute to campus-wide general education goals. We remain committed to supporting and participating in the Liberal
Arts Perspective, the Three Crowns Curriculum, and the Interim Experience with our departmental program as well as with individual course offerings and by offering independent study courses.

- Although we are seeing strains in the fabric of our building, the structure has served the College very well for many years. We appreciate the acknowledgement of the care we take of our facility and are fully aware of the hard work contributed by custodial staff and physical plant staff. We also note the respect our students obviously have for such a heavily-used building. Although we sometimes shake our heads at their actions, it is good to remind ourselves of the absence of graffiti and the infrequency of broken furnishings so common in other institutions filled with college-aged individuals. The reviewers expressed envy at the variety of open study areas and teaching areas we have struggled to carve out of our building with limited budgets. Again, we appreciate the acknowledgement of the work we have done updating and improving what is a beautifully designed building.

Organization (Staffing) Challenges:
It is a point of pride that the library faculty has a long, successful record of collaboration and support with each other, with our colleagues at other institutions and with our colleagues on the Gustavus faculty. We operate on the basis of consensus, deeply respecting each other’s opinion and voice. We do not feel ourselves to be “rugged individualists” (the comment was incorrectly heard by the reviewers), yet we recognize the freedom that each of us has to pursue our areas of responsibility as we see fit. Far from restricting our activity, we believe that our basic organization—both faculty status, with the same tenure and promotion criteria applied to all campus faculty, and the elected chair model—serves both the department and the College very well. For example, requiring library faculty to meet the same tenure and promotion criteria other faculty must meet, appropriately puts the onus on the library faculty to make our case in the broader context of College teaching goals and learning outcomes.

It is important to note that there are key differences between our implementation and application of an elected chair model and that of other institutions such as Dickinson and St. Olaf which have both reverted to a hierarchical model. Those institutions saddled the administration with either high costs (e.g., search and salary costs for a replacement for the person elected chair) or with unrealistic expectations on the library faculty (e.g., the musical chairs plan where all librarians regularly rotated responsibilities across the department). Our plan, by first retaining more responsibility in the group of library faculty, and secondly by investing responsibility in working groups of the entire staff renders the job of chair less burdensome while assuring all have broader knowledge of library-wide activities. Thus, at Gustavus, the elected chair model does not constrain the work of any library faculty member.

The reviewers indicate that the elected chair model “makes sustained strategic change difficult.” We believe we can point to a history of innovative thinking and dynamic change in response to developments within the profession, within the publishing world and within higher education as
evidence that our model is successful. These innovations have progressed in spite of the challenges that our inadequate staffing and budgets magnify.

We do not suffer an absence of leadership within the department. We have a department chair (who can be either reelected or replaced with little institutional trauma), we have a group of dedicated faculty librarians and we have a thoughtful and imaginative staff. We have organized ourselves into task-oriented committees of staff and librarians who have demonstrated great leadership and creativity in addressing needs and enhancing every aspect of our program. Because we do not have all responsibility vested in one person, our system is not limited to the vision or lack of vision held by a single leader firmly ensconced in a powerful position. Vision and strategic change need not be delivered by a leader from above. Rather, vision and strategic change can be developed successfully by a group and we believe that a group working in consensus will have broader engagement and wider acceptance. Our system is open to strategic change, open to the creativity and energy of new people, open to the expertise developed over time by senior staff as well as the ideas of the entire department, and at the same time less afflicted by the whims of an individual.

We do see merit in the points made by the reviewers about allocation of open positions. By inflicting salary rollbacks and position cuts, the administration has made reallocation and reassignment difficult. Without assurances that the administration will not interpret realignment of responsibilities as indication of a lack of need, it is difficult to make changes or to move a person internally without advertising, and it is difficult to adapt to future staffing needs. Furthermore, salary cuts and rollbacks are exceedingly demoralizing and certainly do not encourage volunteerism. It is important to note that although the size of the library staff may be among the larger within the Gustavus academic affairs division, we are not overstaffed and the fear of losing yet another position is a strong disincentive to change.

The Library faculty has long advocated for a system of library support staff promotion that ties increased compensation to achievement and growth. Such a system is included in our Strategic Plan. We also agree that loss of creativity and inspiration are possible consequences of a flattened organization where there is no possibility of advancement. Librarians have the opportunity to advance through the ranks of assistant, associate and full professor through recognition of both professional achievement and campus contributions. Over the years, Gustavus librarians have held positions of leadership within the wider faculty structure, within our professional organizations at both the state and national level and have each been active in conference presentations and publishing. Such activity has helped our small department lead and keep abreast of professional developments and has contributed to the overall success of the department. With the bare-bones Gustavus staffing model, support staff would benefit greatly from such a system as well. In partial recognition of that need, we have offered access to staff development funds for the library support staff, with a greater amount awarded for those who are presenting or who take a leadership role in a conference or workshop. Staff have participated in statewide professional organizations, joint user-system development and presented at conferences. We continue to believe that a system that fully recognizes such activity would be in the best interest of the department and the College.
Budget Challenges:
An examination of library budget support by the College reveals a truly sad situation. We suspect a degree of complacency has been established in the administration’s perspective on our budget with a persisting idea that the library can muddle along without sufficient funding. Inadequate collections have direct curricular ramifications when of such magnitude as ours and the budgeting process is controlling what is essentially a curriculum planning responsibility. We do not feel we are able to fully support the curriculum with current funding levels, although we are quite proud of our achievements in the circumstances. As the reviewers note, at approximately $260 per student of acquisitions expenditure we are laughably far below the $516 per student median expenditure of our Oberlin group peer institutions. This is an ongoing situation and although not as dramatic as with the Oberlin schools, our funding comparisons to other aspirant and affinity groups of colleges is similarly dismal. Additionally, we continue to use our operations budget to supplement our inadequate acquisitions budget to the detriment of our ability to fully support operational needs. This is neither a wise nor sustainable practice. We believe the College needs to dramatically increase library acquisitions funding.

Collection building, including providing access to electronic resources, is largely an anticipatory adventure and we have been creative in our approach. We do use the direct ordering and approval plans that the reviewers mention, but our low numbers limit the discounts the reviewers suggest could be gained with a more robust approval plan. We use both the pay-per-view model of journal access and employ inter-library loan as a means of stretching our budgets. As scholarly communication and publishing shift to an increasingly subscription-based electronic model, the inadequacies of our budget will magnify.

Our budget situation is not a problem requiring a one-time fix, nor is the solution to be found in an easy shift from in-house to outsourced activities. We continually look for labor-saving programs and compare in-house to out-sourced procedures on a cost vs cost basis. An ongoing commitment to what is undeniably an expensive enterprise is required to assure that students have access and exposure to quality scholarly publications in all of the disciplines taught at the College.

Student Learning:
The strength of our educational program lies in the creativity of the library faculty and our openness to pursue multiple approaches to student learning goals. We recognize that there are differing levels of interest among the faculty in other departments in collaborating with us and different amounts of time available to us within their course schedules. We firmly believe that although one model may be quite successful in some departments, it may be less so in others given time and course design constraints. However, it remains our responsibility to serve all students across the curriculum. In the absence of a single curriculum mandate, we believe that at this point traditional reference services, individualized course-based instruction sessions and integrated labs are all useful and successful strategies. Web guides and tutorials also play a role. Such a mix is also sustainable with our staffing levels. We continue to learn from each other as well as from colleagues in our discipline, and we continue to work with other Gustavus faculty to offer the appropriate mix of opportunities for students to develop information fluency skills.
Library Building—Physical and Virtual Environments:
We maintain our commitment to cooperating with other campus units to provide a positive learning environment in the library building and elsewhere on campus. The physical library houses only a portion of our collections since our electronic collections are available campus-wide (and beyond) by design. We share the reviewers’ distinction between the library as structure, library as a group of individuals and library as a collection of resources. The library structure and collections belong to the entire Gustavus community. Yet the library faculty and staff have a direct responsibility to provide and preserve physical and virtual resources and to teach and promote research skills using the complete range of tools that students may encounter in their projects. This includes books, databases and journals, reference works, materials in the College and Lutheran Church Archives, the Special Collections & Rare Books, films and recorded music. We need to provide instruction spaces for our classes and seminars and spaces that encourage discovery and reflection. We also need appropriate space for our own work. We are greatly concerned with the preservation of both individual and group study spaces on a campus where such spaces are a premium. In that same spirit, we believe that student-focused academic support services, not offices, could enhance the student-learning environment in the library. As the College embarks on a renovation and addition to the Bernadotte Building, we are eager to work with outside planning consultants and campus colleagues to improve what is already a positive and flexible environment.

Addendum Questions—Department Integrated Instruction:
As noted above, integrated course instruction is one approach we employ to meet learning goals. We have an established track record with the First Term Seminar—although we always believe there is room for adaptation and improvement. We also work closely with senior seminars and have made an effort to maximize impact in mid-level courses, pulling somewhat away from the widespread one-shot offerings in mid-level courses by which the students are bored through repetition. Additionally, we have laid a strong foundation of work in the methods courses, particularly with the Political Science, Geography, and History departments and the beginnings of a successful system outside of the one-shot model with others such as Geology and Communication Studies. We are committed to further developing these relationships and capitalizing on our existing relationships with individual faculty members to broaden our lab-integrated participation to additional departments.

In spring/summer 2014 library faculty will offer a faculty development opportunity on threshold concepts. A major goal of the project is to inspire faculty and librarians to further cooperation in improving information fluency teaching and learning.

Addendum Questions—Licensing Content & Open Access:
We subscribe to digital content directly and we use the statewide consortium, MINITEX, and the Oberlin Group to broker licensing deals. We currently employ pay-per-view access for some ACS journals and we regularly review various subscription options and substitutions, including relying on inter-library loan and paying copyright fees associated with ILL. With our budget constraints, we have to be both creative and cautious in committing to long-term subscriptions of electronic resources and remain aware of how copyright and individual access charges can accumulate. We appreciate the reviewers’ reminders and
draw the administration’s attention to the fact that purchasing digital content can quickly overwhelm a library budget both with high subscription fees and annual costs increases. It is not uncommon for database subscriptions to increase 2-5% a year. We also note that electronic resources consume the largest single component of our acquisitions budget—nearly $350,000 this fiscal year.

Our involvement with Open Access has to this point been limited by time demands, although the library faculty has discussed ways of shifting some responsibilities to allow for increased attention to the concept and the refinement of our plan. We have an institutional repository and believe it is helping to raise awareness of the issue. We are also developing a five-year plan of actionable activities for promoting and educating the campus community about Open Access, such as conducting a survey, offering Teachers Talking presentations, creating Web guides and creating regular blog postings. These activities should form the basis of a sustained drip of information to the community on the topic. The Library has also co-sponsored an Open Access initiative within the Oberlin Group and we will continue to develop and promote that endeavor.

Summary:
The review visit and the reviewers’ report have served as the basis of numerous conversations among library faculty and staff in a variety of settings. In our collective opinion, it is a positive report. We are cheered to see recognition of some of our efforts and appreciate the emphasis the report makes to the College administration on significant aspects of our program. We further appreciate the suggestions for additional action and discussion contained in the report and will consider them alongside other options available to us. Although we were disappointed in some of the focus on non-departmental issues, we recognize that the reviewers also met with students and faculty outside of the library and that the review report reflects the mood of the campus at an extended time of frustration and low morale. The report stimulated many conversations within the department this past academic year. We anticipate continuing many of these discussions over the coming years.