

LIBRARY LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

MIDTERM INTERVIEW PROJECT

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## GOALS

The purpose of this interview was to:

- Learn about one person's experience as she rose from research librarian to Associate Director of the group of libraries at a mid-sized, private university.
- Determine how librarians currently collaborate with faculty at this university.
- Define the process for promotion within an organization.
- Understand how the organization of the libraries at this university has evolved over the last decade, and how library leaders plan for continued growth and change.

## INTERVIEW

I sent a series of questions to E. and she replied via email. We then had a video call to discuss the interview, and I asked a few follow-up questions. I used Google Docs to convert that conversation into text as well. The transcripts of both her original answers and our follow-up discussions are in the appendices.

## BACKGROUND

E. is currently the Associate Dean of SMU Libraries, as well as the Director of Fondren Library, the primary library at Southern Methodist University, where I work as Research & User Experience Intern. Fondren is home to about 20 librarians that work in Access Services (covering circulation, ILL and stacks) and Information Literacy (including reference services and subject librarians).

In addition, there are five other libraries on campus that are organized under the Dean of Libraries (associated with the colleges of business, theology, and arts, as well as the law library and special collections). SMU Libraries also has a department of Collections & Technical Services (for cataloguing, acquisitions, and electronic resource management) and a department for Library Systems (website management and digital collections). Overall, there are more than 100 librarians and library specialists working on the campus among those buildings and departments.

## QUESTIONS

I initially emailed the following questions to E.:

- Why did you choose to work in academic libraries?

- I found your CV on our website (<https://www.smu.edu/-/media/Site/Libraries/fondren/about/director/vita.pdf?la=en>). Is there anything else in your experience, not listed in your CV, that has contributed to who you are as a librarian and an administrator?
- What do you like about serving as an administrator at Fondren and SMU? Is there anything you miss now that you're serving as an administrator?
- I can see the definitions of the librarian ranks on our website (<https://www.smu.edu/libraries/staffresources/personnel/Appointment-and-Promotion-of-Librarians>). Do the individual librarians need to apply for the leveling up, or are they invited to? By whom? And who determines that promotion? You? Our Dean?
- Has the library or university ever considered using a tenure system for librarians? If so, when? And why did they decide not to do it?
- What's the status of the Brightspot project to revamp Fondren Library? What was the pre-COVID determination? Has that changed since the pandemic began?

A week after her response via email, we had a video chat. During that discussion, I asked her these follow up questions:

- Do you think librarians partner more with faculty and across campus than they used to? How has that evolved since you started working at academic libraries?
- How has the organization of library staff changed since you started working at SMU? What brought those changes about?
- In regards to redefining the promotion process, do you think it will be just better definitions of each level, or will the whole process be reconfigured? What do you think it might look like?
- Do you ever hire people straight out of school to be subject librarians? I saw that our current subject librarians are levels 2 and 3, but I was curious if that might be an acceptable position for someone just starting their career.
- Will the revamp of Fondren Library include a writing lab? And will the hub be for both undergraduate and graduate students, or just students at the graduate level?

## ANALYSIS

Sending the initial questions via email made it easier to understand her background before E. came to SMU Libraries in 2013. Those responses formed the questions asked during our video call a week later, allowing for a deeper discussion of her experiences at both SMU and previous organizations. While the initial set of questions focused on E.'s personal experience, our conversation was a thorough discussion of the evolution of the various libraries at SMU and the creation of SMU Libraries as a singular entity, rather than a collection of individual libraries on the campus.

The biggest challenge by far was the transcription of our conversation. It is time consuming to accurately transcribe oral discussion, particularly since E. was generous with her time, giving a full hour to our interview. Technology can help with the transcription, but today's voice-to-text tools are still not advanced enough that human correction isn't needed. One needs to go slowly, checking that the correct words have been captured, and typing in missing words or phrases. That said, the tedious process allowed for repeated readings of our discussion, to learn better from her experience.

## CONCLUSION

E. was honest and open about the evolution of the organization of SMU Libraries, acknowledging where there have been challenges in leading change. I learned a great deal about the politics and pros and cons of different types of academic organizations – for example, who leads the library, a Dean or a Director? Is the head of the library or libraries at the table with other Deans, or is she outside of those rooms? How can the organization chart affect how decisions are made, whether that's who gets promoted or how the website gets updated?

That said, E. also acknowledged that hiring is a key component of the organization running smoothly. While a bad organization chart can create barriers to productive work, building a good team is essential to the organization running smoothly. When asked about the open communication at SMU Libraries, both across libraries (horizontally) and from the top down (vertically), she pointed to both better organization and hiring team players as key reasons for the improved communication.

E. admitted that the current promotion process at SMU Libraries needs work. Levels of librarianship are not well defined, and, particularly compared to processes at previous organizations, she feels more guidelines need to be made to formalize the process and to define expectations. A task force has been created to review the promotion process and make suggestions, but it has been delayed by the pandemic and the need to focus on more pressing issues.

E. conceded that while librarians currently collaborate more with faculty than they have in the past, faculty can often be siloed and dissuaded from collaboration outside their departments due to the current academic processes of promotion, tenure and review, tied as they are to the publication of articles in established journals. Newer professors and graduate students may have interest in such collaboration and interdisciplinary work, but it's challenging to do so when the work may or may not be considered when up for promotion or tenure.

E. also discussed the idea of whether librarians should have faculty status or tenure. (SMU librarians currently have neither status.) Because she's had the experience of faculty status, E. can see the advantages and disadvantages of having that. At a former position, having faculty status gave her entry to rooms where university policy and strategy were being discussed. As she noted, "It makes a difference to be in the room. It makes a difference who you know. ... I watched and I listened as they discussed the politics of **how** to say something," (see Appendix B, pg. 12). But when contemplating making that change at SMU, she is aware of how that might affect staffers' salaries and benefits. It was clear that E. looks at the organization as a whole, while thinking about her staffers as individuals, when considering such organizational changes.

Finally, our conversation reinforced many readings for various classes that emphasize the necessity of embracing change. Much of the recent history of SMU Libraries has been one of change, revamping Fondren Library's public spaces to encourage collaboration and socializing in 2016, and creating the structure that is now SMU Libraries, with a Dean at the top of the organization chart, in 2018. If that weren't enough, SMU Libraries had been working with consultants at Brightspot throughout the 2019-2020 academic year to consider how to revamp other areas in Fondren. During our conversation and then again afterward in a building-wide meeting, E. confirmed that the decision had been made to create a hub for research support in the library, a place that will primarily support faculty research but could also help graduate and undergraduate students. The hub would house staffers from OIT and the library and further establish connections between faculty and librarians at the university.

Our conversation reinforced the respect and admiration I have for E., who, in hand with our Dean, has led us with confidence and humility during the trials of the past six months. Her remarks about the future of SMU Libraries, particular the visions of a research hub and more partnership with faculty on campus, inspire me to start my own career as a librarian at a university where I can be part of such a collaborative environment.

## APPENDIX A

I sent the following questions in italics to E., the Associate Dean of SMU Libraries, and the director of Fondren Library, the central library at Southern Methodist University, on September 16, 2020; she replied with the below answers on September 21, 2020.

*Why did you choose to work in academic libraries?*

I started out at a public library because that's where I could find a job. After 2 years I knew I didn't want to remain in public libraries. I was a reference librarian who sat at a desk every hour of every day to answer questions. I learned a ton about being a librarian, but the hours were terrible and it was a hard job to do every single day, and there was no change to my job. It was all the same work and no advancement or creativity or communication. I think I had 5 bosses in 2 years because of the turnover. It was not a good situation.

A job came open at the University of Texas Medical Branch for a medical librarian. I didn't have any experience as a medical librarian but it looked interesting to do reference work for medical and allied health students, residents, doctors, and nurses, and it was in my town, so why not try for it? I got an interview and somehow got the job and I loved it.

I stayed in medical librarianship for a good while. In my next job at Hartford Hospital in Connecticut I was a clinical librarian where I worked in a hospital finding research for real live hospital cases, went to hospital rounds to hear the cases and respond to requests for medical research for patient care. I loved that job, but it was in an economic contraction. I had been there two years, so I was one of the first to have my job cut to part-time when they had to balance the budget. Thankfully, I had already applied for a job in Orlando at the University of Central Florida where they were looking for a health sciences librarian. My sister and brother-in-law teach at UCF, so I wanted to be near them and my nieces, so it was a perfect fit. My medical background fit the job and so they hired me.

I stayed at UCF for 13 years and moved up to interim Head of Information Literacy, a new department, and then the permanent head. Next job was SMU as Head of Research Services, then Director of Fondren, then interim dean, now Associate Dean.

I've stayed in academic librarianship for many reasons: (1) I found I loved working with students and teaching; (2) I loved medical librarianship because it was very challenging and the work made a real difference in people's lives; (3) I found I loved working at a research university.

When I was at UCF, I spent a year as a faculty fellow shadowing an administrator in the Provost's office and working on all kinds of issues in higher education. I learned a ton about university governance, accreditation, curriculum requirements, and university strategic planning. When you are in a bubble of being a librarian and helping students and faculty, you can miss the

connections between your work and these larger university functions. It was interesting to learn how universities really work and where we fit into the puzzle. I've loved academic librarianship because of the challenge of finding the ways to infiltrate and elevate librarian contributions to the mission of the university.

*I found [your CV](#) on our website. Is there anything else in your experience, not listed in your CV, that has contributed to who you are as a librarian and an administrator?*

I list on my CV all of the services work that I've done, but you don't really see the ways that helped me grow. I learned a great deal serving on the university Faculty Senate and the university committees I was assigned to as a result. I served on a lot of committees. I ended up chairing one of the curriculum committees which was a growth experience. And then I served on the Florida Chapter of ACRL where I ended up being elected VP and President. I had to organize the annual fall meeting which was another growth experience.

Looking back, all of these experiences where I grew into leadership made it easier to not be as terrified when I ended up in higher leadership positions at SMU. I was still terrified, mind you. Just not as terrified. I'd also say that my experience at UCF, partnering on a huge project with OIT to build information literacy learning objects, had a large impact on me. I learned tons about project management and communication between two very different worlds. I was able to see the IT culture up close, learn a new language and see the librarian world from their point of view.

*What do you like about serving as an administrator at Fondren and SMU? Is there anything you miss now that you're serving as an administrator?*

Yes, I miss teaching and students! It was very rewarding to help students, teach classes and work with faculty. I was embedded in a lot of online nursing and health sciences classes too, which was fun. I was very busy answering questions and meeting one-on-one to help students in research consultations.

While I miss all of that, what I like about being an administrator is working on the bigger picture of planning and organization. Here the challenge is taking a library organization that has been constructed with three libraries that for a hundred years have functioned separately from the other three libraries and working to build one cohesive library organization that works collaboratively to create a consistent experience for students and faculty. I like thinking about and planning the steps it will take to build a robust, creative library system that thrives on growth and change.

*I can see the [definitions of the librarian ranks](#) on our website. Do the individual librarians need to apply for the leveling up, or are they invited to? By whom? And who determines that promotion? You? The dean?*

There are 4 ranks. Promotion right now is a little up in the air. Normally, librarians make a decision

on their own whether or not to go up for promotion to the next rank. They likely consult with their supervisor who reviews their CV. The librarian creates a notebook with prescribed content (CV, letters of recommendation, evidence of their work (teaching evals, annual evals, publications, evidence of committee work, etc.)). The promotion folders as they are called are reviewed by the librarians on the dean's cabinet who vote and make a recommendation to the dean, who makes the final decision about promotion. Each increase in rank brings an increase to the base salary of the applicant.

Right now, all of this is on hold not only because of the hiring freeze, but also because we need a much better process for promotion and more descriptive criteria for each rank. The dean created a task force to look at promotion and make recommendations for a new model, but as they finished their work, the pandemic hit. That's all still in the works.

*Has the library or university ever considered using a tenure system for librarians? If so, when? And why did they decide not to do it?*

Librarians at SMU are not faculty, we are staff. If we were to work towards faculty status, we would not seek a tenure-track model because we have many librarians in roles that don't fit into the traditional teaching-service-research model of a tenured faculty member. We'd likely want a model where we are faculty with ranks and can go up for promotion, but we're not tenured.

*What's the status of the Brightspot project to revamp Fondren Library? What was the pre-COVID determination? Has that changed since the pandemic began?*

The Brightspot study was completed in February, and I think the dean may have recently shared the final report with everyone in one of her weekly updates. This project is still a high priority. We want to transform the Blue side of Fondren into a hub of research support in collaboration with OIT.

When the new provost recently visited the building, the dean took her to the area and described what we want to build. The provost is supportive, but all of this will take time to build allies on campus and with the community at a time when the focus has been away from a project like this.



## APPENDIX B

I then had a video call on September 30, 2020 to discuss the interview; during our call, I asked E. a few follow-up questions. This is a transcript of our conversation, as well as a link to the recording of that conversation:

[https://unt.instructure.com/files/8833472/download?download\\_frd=1](https://unt.instructure.com/files/8833472/download?download_frd=1)

Edits and summarizations in brackets have been reviewed and approved by E.

As before, my comments and questions are in italics.

*When I was looking through your background, one of the things you said at the end was that you loved academic librarianship because of the challenge of finding ways to infiltrate and elevate librarian contributions to the mission of the university. I'm curious: Do you think librarians partner more with faculty and across campus than they used to? How has that evolved since you started working at academic libraries?*

I think it depends on the school to me. I don't know globally if I can say that librarians now partner more with faculties than they did 10 years ago or five years ago. I was at a very large school before, with 60,000 students, and twelve librarians, at a very large university with lots of faculty. The mission of the university was to educate and grow wonderful, decent citizens and educated human beings. Every librarian was involved in trying to partner with faculty, but you can see the scale was just, you can never get there.

We did projects that tried to scale, like online information literacy modules. It was a fantastic project, and it did what it was designed to do, which was educate across a much larger spectrum of students. And so, in that sense, that kind of project, that kind of integration, into the curriculum was far beyond anything before. So have librarians partnered more over time? Yes, in my experience. We used technology and innovation, ways to go beyond a one-shot orientation to how to check out a book. That feels like eons ago, right?

*Has information literacy been a part of that expansion?*

I think so. I remember seeing a lot of the innovative things people were doing were at community college libraries, or they were at smaller private schools. I think it was because with the scale, it was just so much easier to build these relationships. if you have a thousand students, or 3,000 students versus 10,000 students, it's a lot easier.

It's also made a difference when librarians get faculty status. In my experience, that faculty status opened up a lot of doors for you. So I was on Faculty Senate, I was on university committees...

*It helps you make those connections better.*

Yeah. It put me in rooms. I was not on equal footing; there's no illusion about that – I was not a tenure-track faculty. But the work that we were doing, where they could see me in the room, see me in a conversation, made a difference. It put me in conversations where I could interject about what the library could and would support and what ways we could help.

I think librarians over time have been innovative. Technology makes a huge difference when you're talking about how to tackle a problem that requires education across a large number of students, and you can't be in a classroom that many hours, because you don't have that many people, and you don't have that many faculty to say yes. If you have technology solutions, like modules that go in Canvas that faculty can easily use, with no labor on their part, it's a no-brainer.

My point of view over the last 20 years is that in some ways it's changed and in some ways it hasn't. What's changed is, I think, the degree to which librarians leverage technology to reach more students and faculty. I think the librarian quality here at SMU is far and above what I've seen at some other universities. [She discusses a couple of examples of people on staff.] We have librarians who create an atmosphere of high standards, and expect people to rise to those standards. It hasn't always been that way. We built this – this was not the case in 2013 [when she first came to SMU].

I do think there's room for improvement. I think if we had faculty status, it would make a huge difference. But I do think we have the perfect setup at SMU, with the size of the institution and the people we have.

*Do you think that it helps that at least we have a Dean of the Libraries to be in the rooms with those conversations?*

It helps tremendously. If you're not in the room, you don't know what's going on at any level. You can see email announcements, or you might catch something from whoever you report to [that's] telling you. But it helps to have a Dean who gets it. It helps to have a Dean who's always thinking of ways the library should be front and center – and a Dean that speaks up, a Dean that talks...

And it goes both ways, right? You need a Dean that can be in the room with the other Deans and the Provost and the Board of Trustees, and represent the library's point of view, as an advocate for the library. And you also need a Dean that can reach out to librarians – to staff and interns – and make everyone feel like they are part of this effort, everyone has a role to play.

If you have a Dean that wants to be more “Deanly,” like be more separated, because “I’m a Dean, and I’m amongst the Deans, doing ‘Deanly’ things,” and occasionally tells the rest of the org all the Deanly things. And, you know, there’s a protocol for **how** to talk to the Dean, and there’s a protocol for **when** to talk to the Dean, and we shall only meet in these ways. You know what I mean? Some people can separate themselves more with that position.

*Since everything happened in March, which is such a huge crisis for any organization to deal with, I’ve been very impressed at the vertical communication. How [our Dean] is always in contact with us, that you [as Director of Fondren] are always in contact with us – and it doesn’t feel like a voice coming down from above. It feels like we’re all a part of a team, and how are we going to get through this together, working together, which doesn’t always mesh with what we hear from the university at large.*

It’s a disconnect, right?

*Yeah.*

I’ve worked under people [where] I didn’t feel a part of the team, like what you’re saying. I’ve been there. Especially in a crisis like this, you really notice. You’re like, all right, I’m on my own. But at least with the library, it doesn’t feel that way to me. It might with the university, but not here. [Short discussion of other environments where there was a lack of respect.] It’s hard to work for people when you don’t feel valued.

*Exactly.*

You asked about the Dean: You know, I’ve worked at a school where the director [of the library] was a Director, not a Dean, so he’s not in the room with the other Deans.

*That’s why I was wondering – because even if we don’t have faculty status as an organization, at least if we have the Dean at the top, I would think that that would at least help a little.*

The last job, he reported directly to the CIO [the Chief Information Officer], he reported up that way.

*So it was completely separate from the academia.*

Right. He reported to the head of IT, and the IT head reported to the Provost, and then over here are all the Deans. And what was interesting is, at that job I was a faculty fellow, and they had just opened it up to librarians. Because we pointed out that it was faculty eligible, but it doesn’t say librarians, so they changed it. So I was a faculty fellow, I was in the weekly meetings with the Provost and the other Deans, and my Director wanted me to tell him what was going on. Right? Because he’s not in that room.

It makes a difference to be in the room. It makes a difference who you know. And because of that position, I met a bunch of people, and I was in rooms where they were writing. I reported, as a faculty fellow, to the Vice-Provost, who was in charge of the new strategic plan for the whole university. Every Friday, my job was to sit at the laptop, and as they talked in a room to write the strategic plan, I would be at the front with it all on the screen. They would say, "I think it should say 'We will create an environment blah-di-blah,'" and I would type, "We will create an environment blah-di-blah." [And they would self-correct, and she would erase it all.] It's a horrible job, right?

But I watched and I listened as they discussed the politics of **how** to say something.

*Which is something to respect, particularly these days.*

It makes a huge difference to have a Dean. It's a huge difference.

*Do you think having that is more important than having faculty status? Or, in an ideal world, would you have both?*

Well, you know, it's a double-edged sword. You don't want to screw up anything for anybody by getting faculty status, right? You want to look closely. I was talking to the Dean about this the other day – you want to look closely at [whether you're hurting anyone] by going to faculty status in any way. With salaries or raises or any of that stuff, you know? And balance that with the advantages.

But I think it's probably more important for us to have a Dean, looking at how it works. If our Dean was not a Dean, and she reported up through the CIO, I think we would be at a bigger disadvantage. [The CIO] is not in the room with the other Deans. Of course, he reports directly to the President, so he has some advantages over our Dean. If our Dean reported to the President, you'd have the President's ear, you know? But I do think there's an advantage to being on the academic side of the org chart, so I think I'd go with the way it is now, if I had to have that either/or.

*Has the organization flattened out a little bit since you've been at SMU, as far as like the numbers go? If you look at the org chart, do you think it's more flat, or is it more pyramidal?*

I'm smiling because in 2015 I guess you probably heard that the university hired Bain, the company, to do efficiency work studies, and there were a bunch of layoffs. The goal of that was the flattened org chart.

*Let's flatten out the org chart by getting rid of people instead of thinking about how they contribute.*

That's how I became Director. My boss got fired; she was, I think, the Associate Dean, so I'm in a position now that probably gets the axe the next time. But I'm laughing because at one point I supervised 14 people, or something crazy like that, and I supervise five or six now instead.

*And each of them [supervises] no more than eight, right? I was looking at the chart yesterday.*

Yeah. I used to have a huge number of direct reports and I guess it was kind of flattened. It's less flattened now, you know. It's just like with any [other organization]: You have an edict from above about what to do and it screws up the whole org chart, and then you're trying to fix problems [caused by the reorganization] which, well, they still aren't all fixed from that.

Yeah. I mean, I used to have a huge number of direct reports and I guess it was kind of flattened it's less flattened now, you know. It's just like with any [other organization]: You have an edict from above about what to do and it screws up the whole org chart, and then you're trying to fix problems which, well, they're still not all fixed from that Bain stuff.

*Do think communication is better, because you don't have as many people reporting to any one person?*

Well, I don't know if communication is better because of the org structure, or communication is better just because of the people and the methods of communication. I feel like this SMU Libraries is so brand new. Before [our current Dean] was hired, we were split up. [The current Dean of Libraries] is the first Dean of SMU Libraries.

*OK, so this is still a relatively new structure.*

Yeah, in 2017, 2018, she was hired, and that was the first time all the libraries were under one Dean, with the dotted line to Law [the Law Library nominally reports to the Dean of SMU Libraries but primarily the Dean of the Law School]. Before then, it was Fondren, Hamon [the library at the Meadows School of the Arts] and DeGolyer [home to special collections and archives], known as Central University Libraries, and a separate Business [Library], separate Bridwell [Library, for the Perkins School of Theology, and] separate Underwood [Law Library].

So you're looking at an organization that's fairly new, working together – light years, I have to say, from the way it worked in 2013 – just light years of growth, improvement, good hires, and lots more collaboration and communication.

*Was there a lot of pushback when that was going to be announced, that the libraries were going to come together?*

[Laughs. Reminds herself that the interview is being recorded.]

The previous Provost wanted one SMU Libraries, and he put together a task force that I chaired with the Directors of Bridwell, Business, Underwood, and then some more people. My job was to wrangle everybody to a proposal for a model. He said that he wanted an idea for the model, and one of the models we had to propose was that we were all under one Dean, but it could be structured however [we thought best].

[Implies that there was some pushback against change.] This was not a welcome thing for the smaller libraries.

*They felt they would be pushed out, and not listened to.*

You will be subsumed by the monster that is Fondren [the main library]. Yeah.

[Some people expressed concern after the Provost announced that the libraries would be combined.] For the most part, though, ... I don't know, what do you think? I tend to think it's worked out okay.

*I'm coming in after that reorganization, and I'm still seeing bits and pieces that are left over from when things were separate, like website design and social media handles, and that kind of stuff. As somebody from marketing, I can imagine that it stems from something that was bigger in terms of library identification and how the staff felt.*

*Especially since we've gone virtual by necessity, and we're all on chat together, it seems like we're working together as one big unit to solve problems and make sure that all of the students are taken care of. But that's why I was curious how [that went] in that transition. I suspected it was bumpy just because people are usually very reluctant to see change, and then they're afraid for their jobs when they see such structural change.*

I tend to feel like there are always going to be people who didn't want that to happen and still don't want that to be the case, but too bad. It didn't work out that way. [But that's not everyone. Most people embrace the challenge, embrace the change.]

One of the things about SMU Libraries, one of the things about [our organization] even before it was SMU Libraries is that this is a place of constant change. It doesn't take a pandemic. [The Director of Strategic Initiatives] H. and I were hired at the same time [in 2013], and we laugh about... There has never been a year of just coasting, of just, "Oh, what a normal, uneventful year!" No. There has not been a year like that. Ever.

*The stuff that I'm reading for our classes is reminding us that it's better to be an organization that embraces change than one that says, "This is the only way to do it, and this is how we're going to do it, and we won't spend any money."*

*As stressful as the change is, it makes it easier to react when pandemics hit, or when people leave and you have to find somebody new, because you're already used to adapting and heading in new directions.*

We were the people who were here as the organization really became that kind of organization. When I came in everything has been the same for 110 years, and nothing had been unsettled, and everyone was in their own world, doing their own thing the way they've always wanted to do their own thing. And because we came in at a time when all of that was becoming unsettled, either because of Bain flying through and people getting the axe, or through this huge renovation we had with Fondren that changed the way the whole building was used, with the library becoming more of a social center... [There was a huge renovation that added a Starbucks and several collaborative/learning spaces in 2016.]

So we lived through going from a very, very, closed, staid organization, with lots of territorial feelings and lots of bureaucratic hoops to jump through to try to do anything differently... from that to where we are now is a lot of change about the characteristics of an organization, a lot of difference in how people view each other – not just your own work, but how do you view each other? How do you view your counterpart in Bridwell? How do you view your Business Librarians and Law Librarians? Conversations that had never taken place across libraries.

There is still tons to do, right? But getting from where we were when I got here to where we are now, in a short amount of time, and through, sometimes, not your own planning but imposed from the outside – either through Bain, or a pandemic, or [other] cataclysmic [events].

We hired people, but I didn't hire some of them; someone else hired these changemakers. Someone else hired H., who is a changemaker, she's an innovator; she's someone who's going to look for problems and solve them. [Our Reference & Instruction Services Librarian, S., who oversees chat] would talk about the ways we work together across libraries with chat. That's S. going, "This is how it would work better, if we have this group together," [working with other librarians] to figure out how to work across libraries to make chat work better.

Then I jump in, because S. [suggests] "Maybe [this would] be better coming from you." So I'll be in on the beginning, and set up the expectation that this is what needs to happen, and these responsibilities, and then I'm in there for a month or whatever, and [then I ask], "Am I good?" [and S. confirms, so she leaves the project in S.'s hands.]

It's that kind of dance.

*But that's where I'm impressed by the communication – you know, up and down, and left and right. I feel like sometimes you can recognize that [something] just needs to come from a higher person in [the organization,] but it doesn't mean that that's because that's only your decision.*

*It's because you're doing it for the benefit of everybody, and it just needs to show that everybody has come together and said, "This is what we think is best for the libraries as a whole."*

Conversations like that happen to get feedback. An example from yesterday [is] feedback on how [Microsoft] Teams is working or not working for people. So H. gathers some intel, and she does some feedback sessions, and then Dean's Cabinet is talking about it. H. [explains that] some people feel like it needs to come from the top, from the Dean, to say, "What is the purpose of Teams? Why do I need to use it and what's it used for?"

The Dean isn't going to make some rule that every single person has to use Teams; but, you know, the message can be, "This is the forum where we're going to communicate with each other," and encourage people to turn on notifications, to think through [whether] this is a better way to reach the people you need to talk to, and to know all the functionality of it, [ask] how productive can you be with it?

So that's where you get the frustrations of using Teams up to Dean's Cabinet, [and people asking] what do we need to do? Then someone's telling the Dean, "It really needs to come from you, this message. [...] It needs to come from the Dean, it needs to be a Dean thing."

Another good example would be the Guides project. That's a huge project, to try to integrate those Guides across libraries. There's tons of resistance [from people saying], "Don't change the way my stuff [looks]; it works fine. I don't know why I need to redo all this stuff."

But this is a big project, and so you're hearing how it's going, and [M., the Head of Information Literacy] says, "Do you think it would help if we talked about it at Dean's Cabinet?" "That's a brilliant idea, M."

So she comes to Dean's Cabinet and shows the project to all the Directors [of the various libraries,] so all the Directors see the vision of what this should be. Then when their people go, "I'm so frustrated. I have to change all this and I don't know why we're doing it; this is ridiculous," [the Director can respond], "Actually, I saw the bigger vision of where we're headed. I'm sorry you're frustrated – that's terrible – but here's where we're headed and why." Do you know what I mean?

*Absolutely! Because I figured that was one of the reasons that we had [a new position, the Discovery & Systems Development Librarian, C.] come on, so that all of the websites would feel more cohesive, like they're part of one big brand. Because if a student takes a class at Business, and a student takes a class where the guides are at Fondren, you want them to have the same experience when they come to the website. It's such a central part of finding information.*



That is a huge problem, and we have had zero support for the web anyway before we got C. That was another piece of the puzzle that was chopped when Bain came through. We used to have people who maintained the website; those were sucked into OIT or Central [University Libraries]. You need help with the website? Put in a help ticket. Who's your Web Captain at the library, so they can be part of this committee? [They reduced the staffing and made it much more challenging to manage the website.]

So the Dean figured out a way to get the C. position. You're exactly right, but it's only now that we have that. It took 2015-2018, 3 years of just piddling along with tiny little ways to do things. H. and S. did a refresh of the homepage a little, but that's about all you can do.

*Because again, you're stepping on people's toes if you try to get them to do more than that.*

And it takes money and it takes labor. C.'s got a humongous job, but you look at it with the other puzzle pieces with the Dean, we have a very supportive Dean who's going to pull the trigger, so you don't have someone who is gun shy. You have some that [understands that] we need a better home page by August, C. who just got hired in the beginning of May, during the pandemic.

*He got to start during a pandemic. That's always fun.*

No problem! Meet everybody, create a new home page by August. They do that, and they get it all done, and [the Dean] doesn't wait or worry; she asks them to pull the trigger and put it up. Let the ripples of anxiety fly free.

*But you have to learn new ways to do things.*

Now she's headed towards, not a Band-Aid – that was a Band-Aid. What you're talking about is the larger issue.

*It's a harder problem to fix. It takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of buy in from a lot of people. That's where I've been very lucky. I've worked for small companies. [If] we want a new website, I talk to one person, and then I go talk to the graphic designer, and we figure it out together. Occasionally I'll see that I need to go talk to the guy who signs the checks, so we get some buy in. These are very small organizations.*

*When I think about the politics of trying to get this many people on board with changing their work, or watching somebody else change their work – that's hard!*

[How management of the website project has evolved represents how the organization has evolved.] When I think about any problem that needs to be resolved, or needs to be figured

out, you have people now in positions who are going to say yes. You don't have an org structure in the way anymore.

Previously, [if] you had a problem you needed to solve, if you had the Dean on board and you had nobody else, you have independent Business Library, independent Bridwell library, and DeGolyer Library, which is kind of semi-independent but not, and then Underwood [Law Library], which was just really separate. Trying to change anything was almost impossible...

You're talking about a web that's humongous problem. I'm talking about – [if we wanted to change text] and instead of saying, “Not on shelf,” could it say, “Checked out?” I could not [get that change made]. It had to go through committees, like an End User Team Committee, through to [another] committee, up to a Council of Directors. [And if one person at one library disagreed with the change, it didn't get done.]

But what we're talking about is that problem of decision-making in an organization, and where the veto power lies in an organization.

*And an approach that says, “I'm going to stand my ground and protect my staff,” instead of coming in and saying, “How can we make this better for everybody? What do we need to do?”*

Well, the mindset was, “I am making it better for everybody... in my bubble. [...]”

Now we've shifted that mindset. We have evidence that faculty and students don't stick with just one library, they use multiple libraries. So how do we make it work across libraries? [How do we give them similar experiences?] That is a big leap, and some people may still not want that leap, but that's the leap we're trying to make.

That kind of stuff is exciting to me as an academic librarian. That's exciting to figure out, because then you're talking about how to make it work for a history professor who ends up needing something from the Hamon [Library] world because of the history of performing arts or something, who also is interested in sacred music and then ends up in Bridwell [Library]. And she has the smoothest experience possible, with librarians communicating [and referring to other librarians because of their personal expertise].

We're all working together, not against each other, to make sure that person gets everything they need easily. We're not the impediment to a beautiful book, or good research, or helping their grad student finish their Ph.D. Figuring that stuff out is exciting to me. That's fun to figure out.

*Do you think, looking from the outside, that the faculty are less siloed than they used to be? I feel like it used to be that the history professors were only with other history professors, but at least from what I'm seeing, as far as digital humanities, is about creating those connections with*

*other departments, with other librarians, and there seems to be a lot more interdisciplinary work that I'm seeing, but I don't know if that's representative as a whole.*

I would say yes, there's more. S., who was the Provost before this one, he put that in his priorities, something about ascending the pyramid, or ascending the mountain. He put in a priority for interdisciplinary research, and he put money behind it, to fund some grants.

*Which always helps, if there's money in it.*

Yeah. So there were some incentives for faculty. It also helps when you hire new faculty who are less siloed in general. I think there's more interdisciplinary work between faculty.

But, in the interviews we did for our strategic plan with faculty, when we asked questions about interdisciplinary research, there was huge resistance to it. Not resistance like I don't want to change; resistance to the practical problems that come with doing interdisciplinary research – you're incentivized with promotion and tenure, and publications. If you're doing interdisciplinary research, you have to figure out where to publish that. And the journals are siloed, so you're trying to figure out how you're going to get the bang for your buck. Also the work involved to work across disciplines, to understand the different languages you're all using to work on a project.

But the biggest impediment seemed to be the promotion and tenure committees: How are they going to look at this work, are they going to value it the way they would value a strictly solo business management article...

*Published in Harvard Business Review...*

And the senior faculty would say, "I'm not encouraging my junior faculty to do interdisciplinary research. They could do it once they're all tenured up and have done what they want to do, but even then I would hesitate," because they're looking at it from a practical standpoint. So with those barriers, I don't know how far you can go with interdisciplinary research.

*That makes sense. That's what I'm seeing with, you know, papers talking about creating repositories and digital publication, and then again with the digital humanities, there's a lot of people reluctant to put too much energy into it because it doesn't lead to a paper that's published. How do you get out of that cycle of that type of promotion, tenure and review?*

There's so much with promotion and tenure that needs to be cleaned up. That's one of those things where if I was a faculty member, even though it would be sticky and painful, I would want to be in the middle of that to solve that problem, because that is a problem as a librarian that creates all kinds of problems for libraries. Promotion, tenure, the way it's set up, [that] creates all kinds of issues with journal publications, the publishing world, how the publishing

world is set up, and the value people place on certain journals because of their impact factor... That whole world needs a clean-up.

It's all tied in with the publishing industry, too, right? As a library, you're asking, "Why am I paying \$10,000/year for this?" Because it has a high impact factor. "Why does it have a high impact factor?" Because of the self-citations... [There are a lot of issues with the current system of promotion.]

*As far as how librarians are reviewed and get promoted, you said that there's a task force to look at promotion and to consider a new model. Are you talking about just more definitions within what we have, or just completely revamping it?*

I haven't even seen the final report of that task force. I think it was finishing up in February when [the pandemic] hit, so I honestly don't know exactly how far the Dean wants to go, or that task force wanted to go in making changes. Right now, we need we need better definitions and criteria for what it takes to get from [Librarian] 1 to [Librarian] 2, [Librarian] 2 to [Librarian] 3, and [Librarian] 3 to [Librarian] 4. We also need a more detailed process outlined, because if you wanted to go up for promotion one year from 2 to 3, and the next year you wanted to go up from 3 to 4, there's nothing in the guidelines that says you have to have like three annual evaluations between [promotions].

*You need to be at a certain level for a certain amount of time before you can be considered for another promotion.*

Yeah. Right now... you put together a promotion folder, and it goes to the librarians who serve on the Dean's Cabinet. To me, there should be a whole different procedure for doing that, rather than going to Dean's Cabinet [alone], like who votes on what, who recommends what...

When I was at UCF, there was a vote on your promotion, from all the librarians who were at the rank or above what you were seeking. So you were voted on by your fellow librarians on your work, and there was a committee that voted, your director voted. Then it went to the Provost, outside the library, just like all the other promotion and tenure folders from across the university: Here's all the votes, here's all the feedback. Here, Provost, how do you vote? It was a whole process.

[At SMU Libraries] you create a folder and go into a room with the Dean's Cabinet, and make recommendations to the Dean, who makes the final decision; the final decision does not go outside the library. So there are different models. Ours needs to be more detailed in the criteria, so that you know what you need to achieve [in order to qualify for promotion]. We need a better process and guidelines, and then we need a better way to assess that promotion.

*Do you ever hire Librarian 1s as subject librarians? Would you ever consider that, someone straight out of school?*

Oh, yeah. I've worked with people who did not have library degrees who were magnificent librarians but just didn't have the Master's degree. I don't know if we've hired any entry-level librarians lately, but, yeah, definitely. I've worked with some people who were just starting out that were tremendous librarians. I guess it depends on what we need at the time. We want to throw a wide net out, you know, rather than limiting it to people with 2-3 years of experience.

*OK. That's definitely what I seem to be leaning toward, doing subject librarianship, something with user experience, somewhere in that realm, and I really like the team at SMU. I've been impressed at how everything runs and works together, and just the people that I've been working with.*

Yeah, I don't see a reason to ever say, "No, I don't want to hire an entry-level librarian." [E. laughs as we are interrupted by my dog trying to push my office door open and I let her in.]

*Last question, since it's been an hour: With Brightspot, you said that the goal is to create a hub for research support. Is that going to be primarily for graduate students, or will it be for undergraduates as well? Will there be a writing lab associated with that? What's the goal?*

The goal is to support faculty research – it's mainly faculty and grad students; those are the focus. If there are undergrads who are involved in research, they can partake, but they are not the target audience. It won't be a space where undergrads can walk in to use all the tech and hang out.

We don't have a faculty club, or a place where faculty can come together, work together. So we're looking at it as a way to pull faculty across disciplines into one space, too. That would be a side benefit, right? But, yeah, it's mainly for faculty.

*And hopefully that would then carry into their classes as well – we would hopefully be more involved in research with even the undergrads, as well as graduate students.*

So it would house OIT people and librarians, nCDS [Norwick Center for Digital Solutions, which oversees digital collections] and digitization projects, with technology and expertise.

*Gotcha. Cool.*

I know. We just need money. Do you have money? We only need probably \$100 million.

*[Nope.]*

We don't have a price tag on it yet, but there will be a lot of fundraising. [Note: After our discussion, E. let me know that the cost has been estimated at \$10 million.] I was trying to figure out if I would still be here when it becomes a reality. [Discussion of how long it can take to raise that kind of money.]

It's not easy, and there are competing priorities. So who knows? But it's a worthy idea.

*Absolutely.*