Here is a brief summary of activities conducted by the New Brunswick Libraries Faculty (NBLF) in the Fiscal Year 2004-2005

The faculty met seven times, in September, October, and November of 2004, and in January, February, April, and May of 2005. In addition to routine reports and updates, a couple of issues dominated our discussions.

1. A recurring theme was the place of the New Brunswick Libraries and the NBL faculty in the larger Rutgers University Libraries structure. This issue was brought to the fore by the University Librarian’s decision to suspend the search for an NBL Director and to undertake a review of NBL and RUL structure. The January 2005 meeting of NBLF had as its focus a discussion of which elements of our faculty structure we found essential and what might be changed. A consensus emerged that the faculty wanted to retain the core of the current structure: the New Brunswick Libraries and faculty as distinct entities within RUL; an NBL Director with significant authority and responsibilities—including the mentoring of junior faculty; and enhanced faculty governance. The faculty delegated five members—H. Dess, L. Langschied, J. Mardikian, K. Mulcahy, and M. Wilson, representing the faculty, functional units, and scholarly centers within NBL—to request a meeting with the University Librarian to discuss these issues.

Within ten days of the January NBLF meeting, the University Librarian distributed a memo dealing with the structure of the library system, and included a number of possible organizational models as a stimulus to thought. Since all of the proposed models radically changed the current NBL structure, we decided to move up the February NBLF meeting and devote it to a discussion of the proposed organizational models and our response. The meeting between the University Librarian and the five NBLF representatives was scheduled for the same day. The faculty found significant problems with all of the proposed models, suggesting that they tended to be hierarchical, administratively top-heavy, and rigid and rule-bound, rather than nimble and flexible. Faculty members also noted that the new proposals effectively eliminated the organizations the New Brunswick librarians had created over a period of years. The faculty also expressed concerns regarding the absence, to that point, of any significant input from either NBLF, the RUL faculty as a whole, or the staff. The NBLF charged its representatives with conveying these concerns to the University Librarian. At the meeting that afternoon, the representatives did so. The University Librarian was responsive to the concerns and initiated a series of meetings with different groups in the Libraries. As a result, though structural review is ongoing, the implementation of a new model has been delayed, and there are indications that the RUL administration is at least more aware than previously of the critical role played by the NBL Director and the NBL faculty structures in serving the needs of faculty, students, and the general public. The New Brunswick Libraries Faculty needs, however, to continue to make its voice heard during the ongoing strategic planning.

2. Another critical and ongoing issue, occupying much faculty time and energy, is determining
how to fill open faculty lines. The faculty has a whole received several updates from the
Exploratory Committee on Open Faculty Lines, and we dedicated significant time at least two
meetings to discussing their proposals. These discussions are complicated by the evolving
nature of librarianship; ongoing strategic planning in the libraries and the university; and
university rhetoric, which, read literally, often seems to proclaim every area a priority. A
particular challenge the libraries face is how to blend “traditional” librarian skills like subject
expertise and greater linguistic facility (especially as the university expands global programs)
with the need for technological competencies and leadership. We did approve several positions:
an Information Literacy/Instructional Technology Librarian, a Data Architecture Librarian, and a
Social Sciences Data Librarian. A number of other lines remain open, with various proposals
under review.

3. The faculty dealt effectively with a number of other issues. We extended voting rights in
NBLF meetings to Librarians V who have served more than two years (a decision later
implemented at the RUL level). We successfully updated travel policy and instituted a new
structure for reviewing travel requests. We endorsed FASIP criteria and elected a new Peer
Evaluation Committee.

CHALLENGES

A number of issues were raised and explored during the year, but not effectively dealt with or
resolved. They remain as challenges for the faculty

1. Despite a fair amount of discussion and moral suasion, participation in faculty governance
remains a concern. This is somewhat ironic in light of the faculty’s rejection of the apparently
more hierarchical organizational models proposed by the University Librarian. In the Spring
elections, we had a total of six candidates for five separate positions. It is evident that some
members of the tenured faculty have largely opted out of governance responsibilities, while
others are over committed and in danger of burnout. I am afraid I see no clear-cut strategy for
changing the minds of those who have opted out. Our best hope is that as more librarians enter
the tenured ranks, they will see the opportunities and advantages of faculty governance, and seek
an active role. Active participation does give us the chance to shape the discourse, to be active
participants in conversations with our administration, and with the faculty and students whom we
serve, rather than playing a passive role.

2. The faculty may need to think and act more strategically. We have a tendency to respond to
crises and find ourselves in a coping mode. We react to the latest budget crisis, the latest
proposal from the RUL administration, the latest open line. Several colleagues have recently
urged that we need to look at current and prospective open lines in this way, evaluating those
lines in terms of the university and the Libraries’ strategic planning and the changing nature of
the library profession. While it would be unfair to suggest that we have not considered the larger
picture, we probably need to make such strategic thinking an ongoing part of our faculty
governance, with regular discussions at our meetings. We have made some efforts at this, but
without adequate follow-through. Opportunities for such proactive thinking might include
library facilities (with special emphasis on making the libraries places that attract our community
for traditional and not so traditional uses of our spaces), innovative ways of developing our
collections, opportunities for partnering with faculty within and outside of the libraries in developing instructional materials or collections.

3. The faculty has recognized a need to develop creativity in problem solving and determining priorities. To this end, a small group, consisting of Ron Jantz, Marty Kesselman, and Ferris Olin, will begin to explore these issues.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Mulcahy
NBLF Chair, 2004-2005