

Open Letter to Provost Joy Connolly and Center for the Humanities Director Keith Wilson Opposing the lack of Community Input in the Library Renovations and Egregious Resource Gaps for Library and Information Technology Services

We, student representatives of the Doctoral and Graduate Students' Council (DSC), recognize the importance of improvements to the physical space of our university, including the physical space of the first floor and concourse levels of the Mina Rees Library, named in honor of Dr. Rees and first university Dean who helped to establish the doctoral programs of the City University of New York.

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In the 2017 fall semester the DSC learned the administration's plans to make renovations to the first floor of the library. We quickly set up a line of communication with Keith Wilson, an artist and recent hire by Provost Joy Connolly as the Director of the Center for the Humanities. The DSC body also approved the formation of an Ad-hoc Library Committee in the 2017 fall semester coordinated by DSC Officer for Library and Technology. In an attempt to learn from the student body and incorporate student voices in the process, the DSC officer and newly founded committee put together two surveys.

The first survey was filled out by members of the DSC body who participated in the last plenary of the 2017 fall semester. Survey results showed 1) accessibility and 2) workspace were important among other issues. These results were shared and discussed with the DSC Body during the first Plenary of the 2018 spring semester, as well as with Keith Wilson.

The DSC Ad-hoc Committee later distributed an online survey in hopes of capturing a wider net of students. This survey re-affirmed students' desire around workspace and accessibility. Also, while members of the Ad-hoc Library Committee had worked hard to capture students input, DSC leadership also noted the need for a third party to assess student technology and library needs and help build and guide a community-input process. As noted in DSC minutes, DSC Officer for Library and Technology made the recommendation to hire a third party, such as the Hester Street Collaborative, to Keith Wilson in the 2018 spring semester.

At the onset of the 2018 summer session, Provost Joy Connolly announced the "Object Library" project would begin over the summer months and access to the first floor of the library would resume on the first day of classes of the 2018 fall semester. Moving forward, the DSC proposes the following recommendations to the Center for the Humanities and the Graduate Center administration concerning the physical space of the first floor of the Library.

1. **Uphold workspaces and accessibility.** Conversation with students and survey results revealed that workspaces and accessibility are important. Considering that the first floor offers important workspace for students overall, and, in particular, for students with accessibility needs, these findings are not unsurprising. As graduate scholars, we juggle the demands of teaching, research, grant applications, and coursework. The first floor of the library should improve work spaces and workspace environment.

2. **Make available a comprehensive design plan of the Object Library,** including conceptual plans, physical layouts, budget (or fundraising strategy) and timeline. Early conversations about the project revealed that support is needed in developing a thorough plan beyond artistic conceptualizations conveyed verbally. Planning documents should outline goals, how much work space is being lost/ added, and outline changes in operations;

3. **Close the Library and IT resource gaps.** While the DSC was initially optimistic about possible changes to the first floor of the library, the DSC notes that improvements to the physical space must be accompanied by improvements to the library and technology services, and at the very least close the resource gaps that currently exist. For example, the 2018-2019 Student Technology Fee (STF) budget was unable to replace all of the technological software (i.e. Citrix) and hardware (i.e. desktop computers) in the library. During this fiscal year, the STF budget could not replace all of the desktop computers which are being decommissioned due to outdated software. In addition, library database subscriptions and vendor contracts almost entirely operate under a portion of the STF budget. The STF committee granted the Library \$300,000 library and research resources. In addition to allocating more funding to the GC Library in order to procure additional contracts with library vendors, the DSC recommends that GC administration strengthen our partnerships with the New York Public Library (NYPL) and other library institutions in order to increase research resources (i.e., help the GC secure full membership in MaRLI; help GC students secure GC specific work space in other NYC academic institutions and NYPL library branch(es), get access to NYPL resources in GC library computers, etc.);

4. **Include the voices of the Graduate Center community members,** such as students, librarians, staff, visitors, and other users. The DSC strongly recommends that a comprehensive design plan include not only strategies to close resource gaps and meet the needs of Graduate Center students and scholars, but also develop a community input process as well. While the DSC worked hard to learn about students' thoughts, the administration should prioritize hiring a third party to guide an input-process. The sudden announcement to confirm the exploratory phase of the "Object Library" project over the

summer months also alienated students who could otherwise partake in providing feedback in the process and projects themselves.

We thank you in advance for your timely response to this letter.

Regards,

Steering Committee of the Doctoral and Students' Council

Effectively Sign by the Steering Committee of the DSC on November 2, 2018