

## University Senate Library Committee Report, 2002-2003

August 27, 2003

During the winter term of 2002, members of the Senate Library Committee became concerned with signs of growing complacency regarding the status of Kresge Library. Anecdotal evidence indicated that increasing numbers of administrators and faculty believed that increases to the library base budget in FY 2001 and FY 2002 had resolved the budget crises of the 1990s. Moreover, complaints about the collection and services available at Kresge were being met by cautionary language that “we should not try to compare ourselves to MSU or U of M.” Members of the committee were concerned that perceptions of the library were not built on a solid understanding of the problems facing Kresge’s mission. The Senate Library Committee determined that its mission in the 2002-2003 academic year would be to measure the resources and services offered by Kresge Library and encourage a stronger integration of Kresge Library into the instructional mission of the university.

### Methodology for Comparison of Data

We determined that the best course of action would be to develop a comparison between Oakland University and other public universities in the state. In this way we could control for variables in state funding commitments and public commitment to higher education.<sup>1</sup> We excluded from our analysis the three largest state universities—University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University—because they benefit from substantial endowment income and a different pattern of state funding. Data was sought from Western, Eastern, Central, and Grand Valley for three reasons: 1) these institutions compete for the same high school population within the state, 2) they have all engaged in efforts to expand their undergraduate population while also increasing the number of graduate programs, and 3) they have enrollment figures in the range of Oakland’s projected size for 2010.

Since each library maintains its expenditure records, volume/title counts, and other data differently, we chose not to rely on self-reported statistics, which would have been more recent. Instead, we used the data provided in the Association of College Research Libraries’ *Academic Library Trends and Statistics, 2000*; the Association has clearly defined categories of data which all universities must conform to for inclusion in the report. The only drawback of using this source was that Grand Valley had selected not to provide data for this particular annual report, and so had to be eliminated from the comparison.

We also felt it might be useful to provide a less important comparison to those Michigan public universities that elected to retain a smaller student population and de-emphasize graduate programs. Although we looked at Saginaw Valley, Lake Superior, and Ferris, we determined that it would be appropriate to only include Ferris in the final comparison.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier comparison of Oakland to peer institutions in Ohio, Virginia, Kansas, New York, and Oregon can be found in the 2001 Senate Library Committee Report.

## A Review of Budgetary Problems since the 1994 NCA Review

Despite criticisms of inferior library resources lodged in the NCA Review of 1994, the base budget for Kresge Library remained constant from FY94 to FY00. The university did commit “one time funds” for purchase of special items, but the money allocated for collection expansion and management remained stagnant. Although some savings could be accrued from computerized cataloging and other technological enhancements, it was not enough to compensate for a 40% rate of inflation in library materials during this period. Kresge Library was forced to spend increasing amounts of money from its gift endowment, and by FY00 it had functionally eliminated its cash reserves for emergency expenditures. Despite spending from the gift endowment, during the 1990s Kresge Library was forced to suspend a number of periodical subscriptions and reduce the annual number of volumes and data bases purchased.

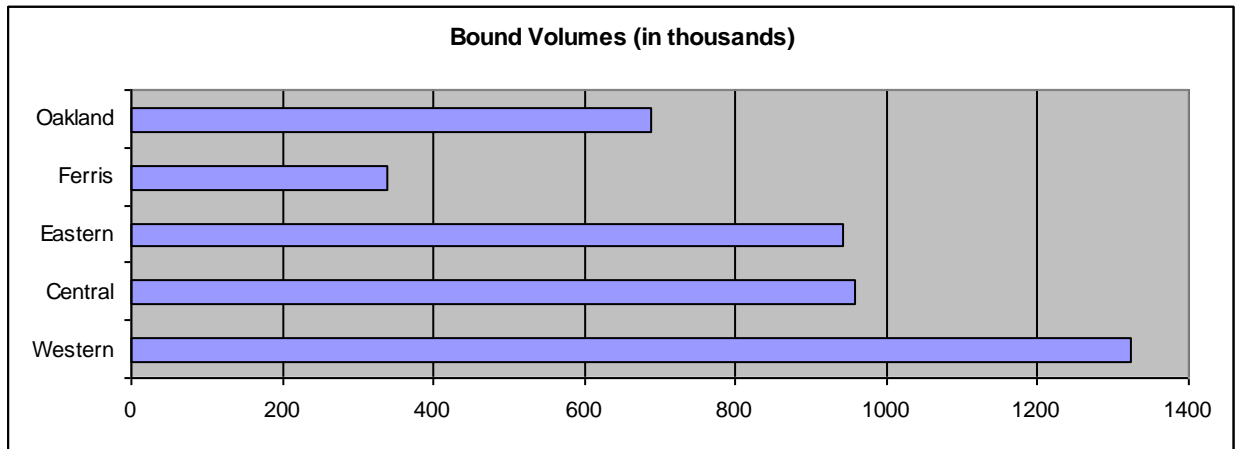
The decision to increase the size of the undergraduate student body at Oakland has created additional problems for Kresge Library. All good academic libraries, regardless of increases in student population, must acquire new material as it becomes available to academic disciplines; this creates a constant pressure to expand the library collection. However, the decision to expand the undergraduate population complicates spending imperatives. As an increasing numbers of students are pushed to share the basic resources of an academic library, the normal policy imperative would be to purchase multiple copies of highly used volumes, or in the case of electronic resources, to acquire simultaneous access for multiple users. In addition, when an increasing number of new academic programs is made available, it is assumed that the collection would have to be enhanced to respond to this new academic need. During the past decade increases to the base budget of Kresge Library have been inadequate to meet these areas of demand.

During the 1990s the number of full-time staff positions at Kresge Library remained constant. This fact, combined with a rising student population, caused the diversion of human resources from collection management to basic instructional services. As a result, the librarians could not adequately supervise some areas of the collection such as archives and government documents, nor could they systematically evaluate the weaknesses of the collection as a whole, or determine a comprehensive plan for library enhancement.

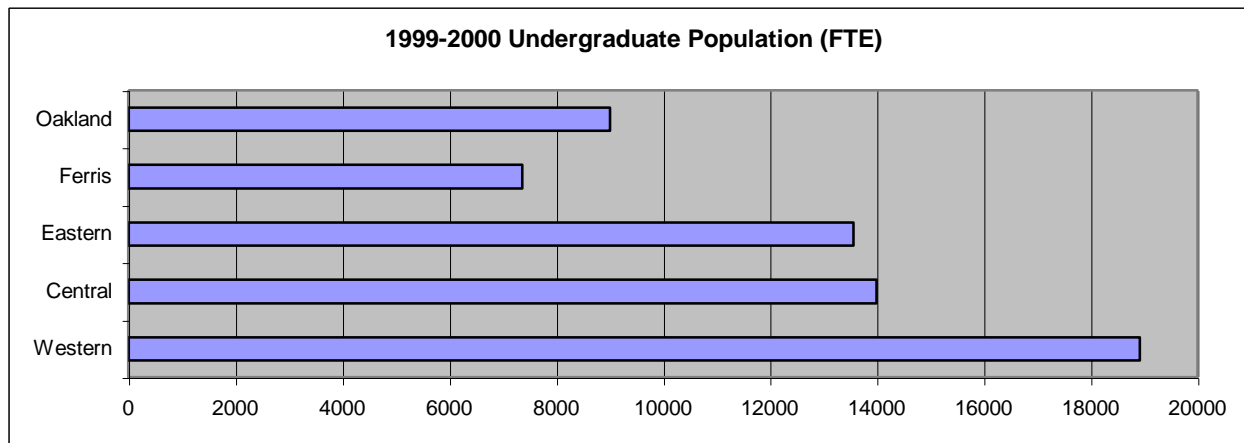
Although the situation at Kresge Library has improved since FY00, with base budget increases in both FY01 and FY02, the library still cannot afford to provide services that are routinely provided at institutions similar to Oakland.

## Explanation of the Statistics Regarding the Collection

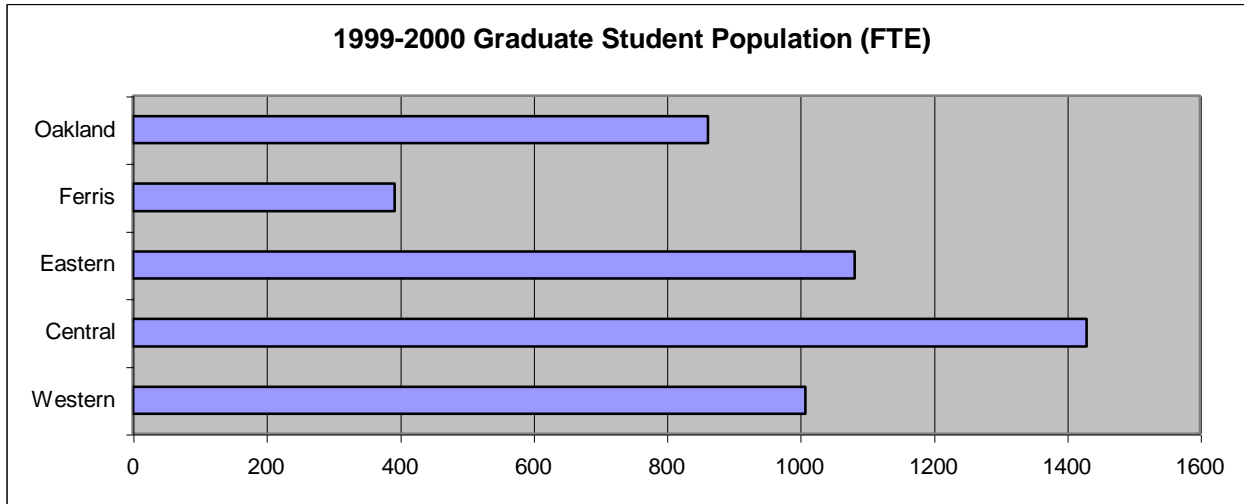
We began our analysis with the fundamental comparison of the number of volumes housed in each library. This figure includes among other things, monographs, novels, bound reference volumes, bound volumes of journals, and bound government documents, but not items such as microfilm, video tapes, sound recordings, or CD-ROM data bases. By far, the largest collection of volumes is at Western, followed by Eastern and Central. Some of this differential in size of collection can be explained by Western's size; it has the largest undergraduate population of the institutions being compared. In addition, Western is considerably distant from the three major research universities in the state, and so is more limited in its ability to send students to other academic libraries to conduct research.



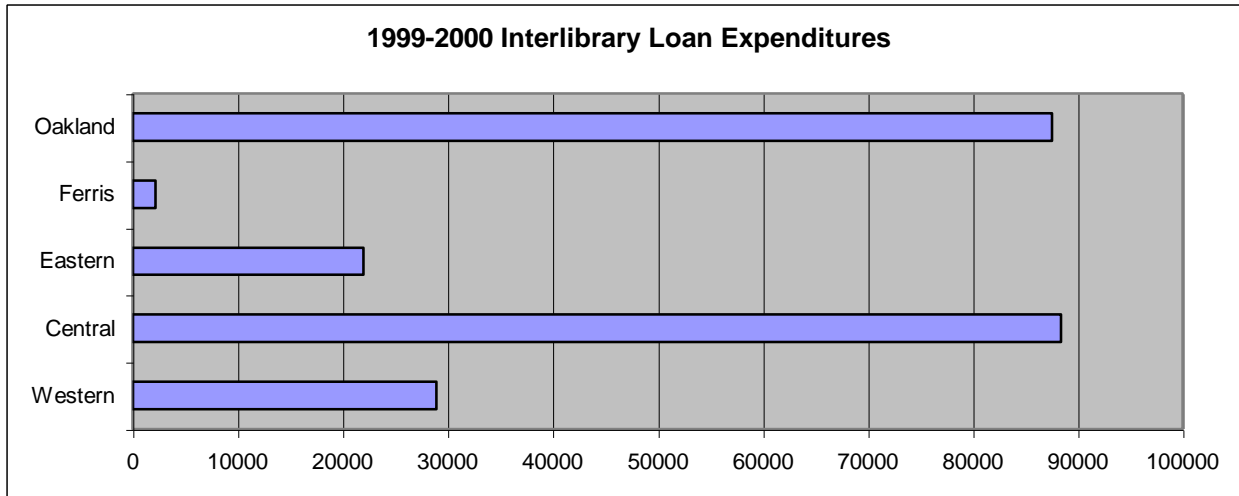
An examination of the undergraduate population at these institutions does help to explain some of the differences in the size of the library collections. The size of the student population at Oakland is more comparable to that of Ferris; this helps to explain the lack of emphasis in building the collection at Kresge Library over the past decade.



However, an expansion of the undergraduate population has been the primary goal of the university since 1994. Rather than comparing ourselves to Ferris, it is more appropriate to compare ourselves to Western, Eastern, or Central. These institutions have undergraduate student populations similar to our projected size. Furthermore, Oakland has a graduate student population much more similar to those of Western, Central, and Eastern.



The problem of the inadequacy of the basic collection is further complicated by the growth of graduate education, both in terms of numbers of programs and numbers of students. Whenever the number of graduate programs is expanded, the demand for more esoteric library material increases. Some of this new demand can be met by interlibrary loans. The costs of occasionally borrowing items for individuals working in a narrow research field is economically reasonable; the purchase of research material in many fields is quite high and the expense of owning a particular item might not be justified by the number of students needing it. However, medium-sized universities, such as Oakland, often collect fees for interlibrary lending which help to offset the payments for borrowing through interlibrary loan. This balance between loaning and borrowing does not exist at Kresge and the net expenditures for one-time use of items is substantial.

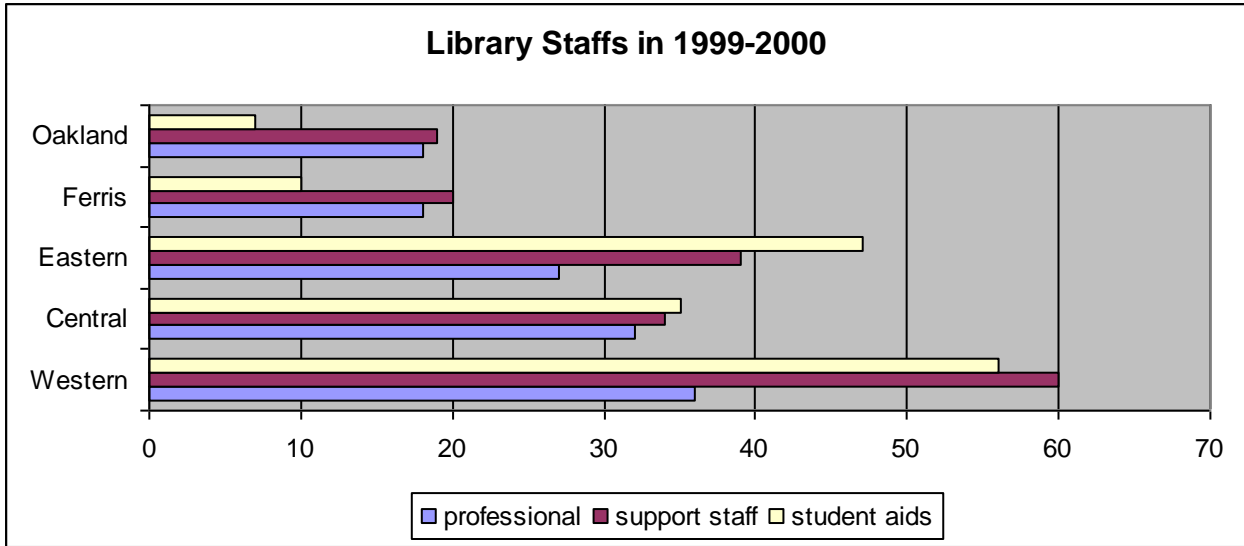


Furthermore, an examination of titles requested through interlibrary loan indicates that interlibrary borrowing is not limited to graduates and undergraduates working on esoteric subjects.<sup>2</sup> Larger and larger numbers of students seem to be using interlibrary loan for more basic research materials, including requests to use interlibrary loan to get materials that are owned by Kresge, but charged out or missing. This excessive dependency on interlibrary loan diverts funds from basic collection development.

This fundamental tension regarding the allocation of resources for collection development is mirrored in the staffing problem at Kresge Library. The number of full-time librarians at Kresge remained constant throughout the 1990s. As Western, Eastern, and Central were expanding their staffs, Oakland did not. From a student service perspective, the category of librarians within the staff is the most important. However, it should be noted that an inadequate number of support staff and student assistants also creates problems for library service. Tasks that might be delegated to student assistants or support staff cannot be delegated at Kresge Library.

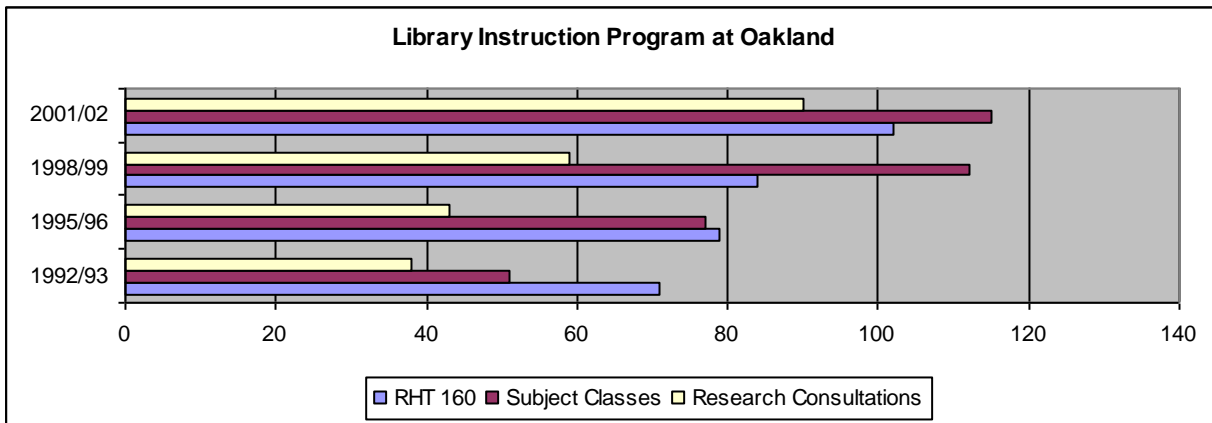
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<sup>2</sup> The comparison of ILL data masks a further pattern which is wide-spread at Oakland, where students will ask friends and relatives enrolled at other universities to borrow items on their behalf.



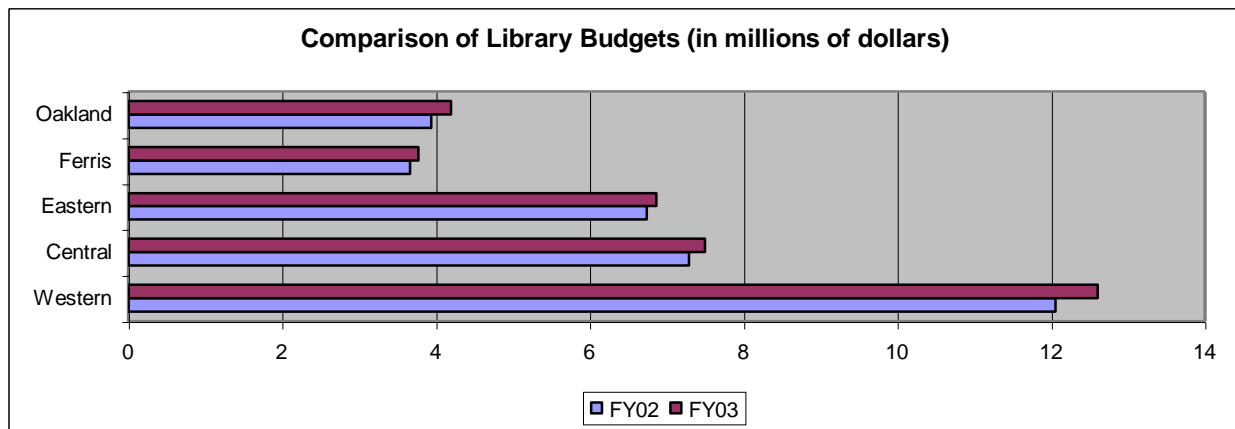
One of the key tasks of the Kresge librarians is to teach students how to conduct research. As a matter of course, a librarian provides instruction in each section of RHT 160. However, the increasing number of sections of RHT 160 has forced changes in this service. Librarians developed a WebCT instruction module that made it possible to reduce the number of face-to-face instructional hours from 3 to 2. Even with the reduction of librarian contact hours, it is not clear that Kresge can continue to serve all sections of RHT 160 in the future.

In addition to providing research instruction in the basic composition sequence, librarians also provide specialized instruction to classes for advanced course work. In the past decade the number of requests for research instruction in specialized classes has doubled. In part this is due to the impact of electronic resources on the research environment—as new databases and search tools are developed, students (and faculty) need to be trained to use them. It is also a result of the substantial increase in the number of students attending the university in the last decade. The demand for individual research consultations has followed a similar pattern, with the number of “tutorials” in research techniques more than doubling in the last decade.



The simple fact is that the number of students being served by librarians has increased tremendously over the past decade. This increased demand for librarians' instructional time has had an impact on the less visible aspects of library work. As librarians spend more hours each week teaching students how to use modern research techniques, they have less time to stay current in the best practices of the profession, less time to analyze and anticipate weaknesses in Kresge's collection, and less time to manage the current collection.

These weaknesses in the collection and staff of Kresge Library are rendered even more problematic by the pattern of budgeting before the current fiscal crisis. An examination of the overall budgets of Western, Eastern, and Central in FY02 reflects the policies of these universities in the 1990s. With consistent budget increases throughout the 1990s, these institutions had a more solid foundation than Oakland University. Oakland's base budget increases of the FY02 and FY03 were not sufficient to catch up to the more systematic growth that had occurred at Western, Eastern, and Central. Our budget holds us in the ranks with institutions such as Ferris State University.



### “Best Practices” Sought by Kresge Library

Despite the budgetary weaknesses over the past decade, Kresge Library has the potential to serve as a positive, constructive force at Oakland University. Deficiencies in the collection must be addressed to fulfill Oakland's role as a leading research and teaching institution. The staff must be expanded to provide the assistance that our students and instructional faculty deserve. However, it should be noted that regardless of the current shortcomings, Kresge Library has attempted to provide improved service.

Members of the library staff have begun to pilot programs to determine whether they would be helpful to the Oakland community. The ones targeted for further development, once funds are available, are focused on creating a stronger research environment for students.

Oakland University has a substantial number of students who have a limited foundation in the use of an academic library. Many freshmen come from high schools with limited in-house facilities and no tradition of sending students to outside libraries to conduct research. Many of our returning students have been out of school for a long time and cannot be expected to be

proficient in the use of materials that are at the heart of a modern, electronic academic library. Even some of our students transferring from community colleges or small four year colleges may not have the skills to make full use of Kresge Library. These students are often embarrassed to admit their lack of preparedness and may prefer to stumble through college with lower grades rather than ask for help. In the Fall 2002 term, Kresge Library began a pilot program as part of orientation. Incoming freshmen were introduced to the library and had an opportunity to meet librarians and other staff members in an informal setting. Anecdotal evidence indicates that this encouraged these students to return to work in the library and overcome their reluctance to ask for help.

Like other universities, the staff at Kresge has discovered that many students prefer to use electronic access and work at home on their personal computers. However, when students work off campus, they do not have immediate access to a reference librarian when research problems arise. Although some of these problems can be resolved through the telephone, problems of the Internet are typically visual and not necessarily easy to describe over the phone. Moreover, students who use telephone lines to connect to the Internet face further barriers to this service. The reference librarians are piloting a program of “chat” reference, where a librarian is dedicated to answering questions on-line in real time.

Many universities use librarians to act as liaisons to instructional department or other groups of faculty; the particular focus of these liaisons is to facilitate the development of instructional web sites and coordinate research activities across disciplines. This interaction between librarians and instructional faculty improves the efficiency of course development. As librarians serve a group of faculty with related research interests, discoveries (both in terms of pedagogical technique and development of resources) are more quickly transmitted through the faculty. Time is not lost in “reinventing the wheel” and the collaborative climate is enhanced.

The current direction of the academic mission at Oakland University is to encourage students to conduct independent research. This is visible in the general curriculum, but also in special programs such as the Honors College and participation in Meeting of the Minds. However, if our students are going to be encouraged to engage in more independent work, they will need to be more thoroughly trained in research methodology. Librarians are well suited to teach students how to use reference materials in searches for secondary literature, determine the library holdings of other institutions, and retrieve material both within and without Kresge Library. It would be easier to attain a higher quality of student research projects if they were assigned to librarians with expertise in their academic specialty.

#### “Improved Infrastructure” Sought by Kresge Library

The first priority for the library is to strengthen the collection so that it may better serve the students and faculty. Once suitable staffing is achieved, professional librarians can be assigned the task of identifying the most critical weaknesses of the collection and create a program of systematic purchasing to address those weaknesses in an economically efficient manner. It is possible to bring the quality of Kresge Library up to the standards of other state institutions with a long-term collection enhancement program.



Certainly the instructional mission will be addressed in any collection enhancement program. Acquisitions for established programs that were deferred over the past decade might still be available for purchase. A number of new classes, and even programs, have been initiated in recent years without the requisite books, reference materials and data bases. In some cases, it would be to the university's advantage to secure multiple copies of important resources. This could be achieved through a combined usage of paper and electronic media.

In its efforts toward collection enhancement, Kresge Library should certainly take advantage of new electronic materials which are becoming a more important aspect of research services. Electronic books can be used to provide multiple copies for students, but also can be used to secure more esoteric works less expensively. Similarly, electronic journal packages can provide easy access to materials for both students and faculty. In many academic disciplines, electronic data sets provide invaluable tools for both rudimentary and advanced research projects. Of course, access to these electronic items will require both the initial purchase (or licensing) costs as well as enhancements to Kresge's library servers.

With these changes in the collection, demand for interlibrary loan will shift. The total expenditures for loans will be reduced, with students limiting their requests to more esoteric works more appropriately held in research libraries. Students will develop a stronger sense of Kresge as their "home library," and a commensurate loyalty to Oakland University as a whole.

#### Plans for the Future

The current budget climate is not conducive to an upgrading of library facilities or services. The immediate goal of Kresge is to limit any further decline in status compared to our sister institutions in the state. Then librarians need to work with the instructional faculty to be well positioned to take advantage of any economic improvement. To present these goals, representatives of the Senate Library Committee addressed the various faculty assemblies to highlight plans for joint programs to enhance the instructional and research support at Kresge Library.

Librarians and instructional faculty have been encouraged to work collaboratively so that the limited resources of Kresge can be exploited to their best advantage. Effective cooperation can enhance course design, diminish student frustration, and set goals for long-term collection growth.

New program growth will have to be monitored more effectively. The university must cease its practice of initiating academic programs without adequate library support. This may require that instructional units work with Kresge Library to prioritize long-term goals for program growth. Instructional units have been encouraged to identify common goals across academic disciplines to exploit the limited current resources more efficiently. It will be the joint responsibility of Kresge Library and the instructional units to ascertain that committed funds for collection development have indeed been utilized.

Faculty and administrators in the instructional units must also be willing to take on greater interest in the financial support of Kresge Library. When receiving outside grants for

projects that will require greater library resources, faculty must remember to itemize library requests in the “overhead” portion of their budgets. When constructing the capital campaign plans, the instructional units must consider the implications for the library collection and staffing. Establishing fund raising goals and setting budget priorities will require substantial collaboration if Oakland University truly intends to become a university of distinction.