

Dear UConn Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Students:

What is the right Library for UConn? Shortly after arriving here in 2018, Dean Anne Langley posed this question to the staff of UConn Library. At the time, no one would have known it was a prescient move that would help prepare the Library to weather a pandemic, but the ensuing strategic planning work has done just that.

Dean Langley's question set the stage for a strategic planning process that began with the development of a set of values that provide flexibility and consistency in decision-making, collaboration, and planning. It's a simple and effective collection of values: curiosity and inquiry; equity and inclusion; kindness and trust; and having fun. Soon after, the Library completed its planning process and published a [Strategic Framework](#) to chart its future. The framework builds on the Library's strengths as a hub of scholarship, research, and learning to support UConn students, faculty, and staff across all campuses and will complement strategic planning at our institution. It also identifies ways that the Library can continue to support the aspirational intellectual goals of the University, while finding ways to operate efficiently amid changes in technology, access, and resources.

The approach follows three themes: Connect, Empower, and Engage. I'm highlighting here a few examples of how those Strategic Framework themes connect with current initiatives.

- **Connect - Advancing a community of learners**

As we look at President Katsouleas's goals to double UConn research and scale Life-Transformative Education to all students, the Library clearly plays a crucial role. COVID-19 has required each of us to think about our work differently, especially in the ways we engage with physical spaces and materials. The Library's approach has been to strike a balance between the safety of staff and community members and as much continued access to materials as is possible. While the physical space and materials are out of reach at the moment, the Library has put many alternatives in place to support the advancement of scholarship as much as possible amid social distancing and other health and safety concerns. All the latest updates can be found on the Library's COVID-19 page, <https://lib.uconn.edu/about/covid-19/>.

UConn Library plans to begin offering limited onsite services, beginning August 31. While there is currently extensive access to materials and research support available digitally, the Library will enhance these offerings by adding curbside pickup of physical materials at Homer Babbidge Library in Storrs, and at each of the Regional Library locations. The hours available for pickup and the specific mechanisms for "curbside" offerings are still to be determined.

- **Empower - Investing in ourselves and sharing our experiences**

The Library staffing is at its lowest level since the late 1960s. While we all aim to be lean in our operations, we also need to be mindful that essential services are covered. The Library is now starting to address a significant reduction in its workforce numbers over the past few years, filling critical vacancies that balance the needs of our campuses with our current fiscal pressures and virtual operations. Dean Langley and her staff are taking a strategic approach to our collections at a time of rapidly increasing costs, coupled with extensive web development to enhance the Library's online presence, which is how most Library users (both faculty and students) find and access research materials, especially now amid COVID-19 adjustments.

- **Engage - Evolving our role at UConn and beyond**

The Library exists as both a physical space and a virtual entity. UConn Library is made up of eight libraries including Homer Babbidge Library, Archives and Special Collections, Regional Campus Libraries, Pharmacy Library, and the Music and Dramatic Arts Library, as well as collection, staffing, and administrative relationships with the Health Sciences Library and the Law Library. Important programs that have been successful at engaging a broader scholarly community include collaboration over the Greenhouse Studios and the state-wide historical preservation work in the Connecticut Digital Archive (CTDA). Although the current context of the pandemic has users focused more toward virtual access, the physical space still holds importance for the long-term plans for the Library. In 2015, UConn began a large-scale master planning process for the Homer Babbidge Library, the flagship Library in the system. This summer, we are installing an external staircase required for proper egress from the building. Apart from this renovation and a 2017 renovation of the first floor, the facility has remained largely the same since 1990. A goal for the University is to pursue the continuation of the master plan to renovate the Babbidge Library infrastructure and design for modern-day academics.

As we continue to plan for the fall semester, access to Library resources at each campus will be a crucial part of our considerations. I am grateful to Dean Langley and the Library staff for their continued dedication to monitoring and implementing best practices in terms of resource delivery and community safety. We are all navigating a novel situation, which requires a blend of flexibility, patience, short-term adjustments, and long-term planning, much like I see in the Library's approach and in so many of our incredible academic operations.

Thank you,  
Carl

**Carl Lejuez**

Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

## **Updates for the Academic Community**

- **Academic COVID update:** We are working on the next set of COVID updates from President Katsouleas as we approach July 1, including the new update of our [Reopening UConn website](#). We expect that these updates will provide more information on teaching assignments, student housing, and how we will meet our gating conditions from the State including testing and social distancing. We understand there is considerable anxiety about the details of reopening and we hope to answer as many questions as we can in this next update. I also would like to thank administrators, faculty, staff, and student members of our multiple working groups, the Senate Executive Committee, and Union leadership for insights and suggestions throughout the process.
- **Messaging on housing prioritization:** Today, Student Affairs [sent a message](#) to students regarding housing prioritization. As many of you work closely with students, we wanted you to be aware.
- **Graduate student reverse town hall:** Earlier this month, a group of graduate students and university partners planned a reverse town hall to share a range of experiences from graduate students. The event was sabotaged by vile messages that included anti-Black and anti-Semitic statements and images. [As voiced by President Katsouleas](#), we denounce these actions and the individuals behind them. Organizers plan to re-engage this event soon and Information Technology Services is available to ensure the event can be safely undertaken. Members of our administration including Vice Provost Kent Holsinger and I look forward to attending this event.
- **Bittersweet news:** [As was announced this week](#), John Volin, our Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, has accepted the position of provost at the University of Maine. John has had an extremely successful career here at UConn as a faculty member, long-time department head, and most recently vice provost. His many contributions will be greatly missed. We are thrilled for him as he undertakes this exciting opportunity. As we have indicated previously, John was set to focus his portfolio on undergraduate studies this fall. I will be reaching out to various constituencies over the coming days and will be in touch soon with our plans to address this important role.

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