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BUILDING TOGETHER ON OUR STRENGTHS

By Janice Simmons-Welburn

Last year, two libraries at Jesuit universities, Loyola New Orleans and Marquette, received AJCU awards as outstanding examples of how Jesuit libraries are looking to the future. We asked the Marquette librarian to discuss how they won this award.

A recent survey of nearly 14,000 college and university students found that, in students' decisions about which college to attend, libraries ranked second among the important facilities of a college campus. No facility received a higher satisfaction rating relative to its importance to students than libraries, which led the investigators to conclude, "These facilities will be important areas to continue to address to ensure higher satisfaction levels."

More than student unions, exercise facilities, dormitories, or even technology centers, libraries weigh heavily in the minds of our students in their decisions on where to go to college and in their satisfaction with campus physical features. As Jesuit institutions, we have built our academic strengths on our respective identities. As we proceed to meet the challenges of higher education in the 21st century, we will want to build together on our strengths.

College and university libraries will continue to show leadership in working with new methods of providing access to and preserving scholarly information. We do this in support of scholarship, and in particular in response to the needs of our faculty in their research and teaching through the acquisition of print and electronic resources. More than that, we must spend time learning about the

needs of our faculty, how they use print and digital materials to do their research and to prepare for teaching in a hybrid environment.

Our libraries are also poised to foster student learning. For instance, our integrated information systems enable users to do much of their work from home or, if they so choose, in libraries, either by themselves or with their colleagues. Thus we can give greater attention to working directly with users with special needs, including individualized instruction and creating physical space that simultaneously accommodates individual and collaborative work.

We also know from experience and research from educational sociologists that students find that the library is a safe place to study, to work, and to socialize. Many wonder about the fate of the library in a community of digital, Web-based information. This is the kind of discussion that underscores the need for continual renewal of the library as a physical place on our campuses. Libraries add wonderful cohesion on what we fear to be an increasingly fragmented campus. At Marquette we have created a place that fits under what sociologist Elijah Anderson recently called the "cosmopolitan canopy" those free and open spaces where we meet and interact with one another.

Finally, collaboration is key to

building on strength. As institutions that share values, we have opportunities for collaborations that will maximize the availability of resources for our users. We will want to work together on digital initiatives. The AJCU Conference of Library Deans has already started an ambitious collaborative digitization project. They are taking on new initiatives intended to digitize our unique parts of our archival and special collections that will provide broader access and facilitate research. It is also plausible to employ the institutional repository models to encourage self-archiving of faculty and student research and to create opportunities to share that information across institutional boundaries.

In the end, we are all engaged in building organizational capacity on our campuses. For Marquette and Raynor Memorial Libraries, this has meant that we have invested in a facility that blends print and digital worlds. We must also create and maintain good will with our respective communities of support. None of this should stand in the way of collaboration across our institutions. Together we can build on our respective strengths. ■

Janice Simmons-Welburn is the dean of the Raynor Library at Marquette University.