

'Devastating' cuts

Jake Moser, News Editor | Posted: Tuesday, January 14, 2014 12:25 am

When Vice Provost and Director of Libraries, Susan Nutter, chose to work at N.C. State instead of UNC-Chapel Hill or Duke, she did so because she saw a library system that had potential to "lead the state."

However, after 14 years and more than \$7 million in budget cuts to the University's library system, Nutter said a lack of funding could have a devastating effect on that goal.

NCSU Libraries was forced to reduce its budget this year by almost 5 percent, or \$1.3 million, due to state-appropriated cuts handed down by the state legislature.

As a result, the department eliminated 14 vacant positions, as well as 13 filled positions. There was also a \$23,600 cut to NC LIVE, a service that provides online access to books, journals, magazines and newspapers.

According to Nutter, the 2014 reduction is equivalent to the worst budget cuts to the library system since she arrived at N.C. State 26 years ago.

Branch libraries, including the Harrye B. Lyons Design Library and the Natural Resources Library have already eliminated Saturday hours and one filled position at each branch, Nutter said.

According to Karen DeWitt, director of the Design Library, the branch libraries provide vital services to students in the College of Design and the College of Natural Resources that will have to be reduced.

"In the past few years, we just had less money to buy materials for the collection [due to budget cuts]," DeWitt said. "But this year we've had to cut our hours. It's really unfortunate because students need to do projects and have access to these libraries at any time."

Unfortunately, these cuts are only half of the story.

According to Nutter and DeWitt, the University Library Committee, a group of students, faculty and administrators that advises the Provost, and N.C. State executives must decide by July whether or not to reduce the hours of operation at either D.H. Hill or the James B. Hunt library for 2015. There's also the possibility of reducing hours at both locations.

In addition, one of the branch libraries might close its doors completely.

"The affect that will be realized first is the reductions in hours," Nutter said. "It's those kinds of things

that are immediate and affect you when you want to come to a library on campus.”

According to Karen Ciccone, director of the Natural Resources Library, if the branch library was to close, it would affect not only members of CNR, but many people who work or study on south campus.

“The College of Natural Resources Library is the only library on the south end of main campus, and it’s 15 minutes to walk to D.H. Hill, and it takes equally long to get to Hunt on the bus,” Ciccone said. “For students and faculty who work on this part of campus, it would be a big inconvenience.”

The Veterinary Medicine Library is also considered a branch library, but it won’t reduce its hours or close because students and faculty might need to do research in emergency situations when performing medical procedures in the Veterinary School hospital, Nutter said.

Alternatively, reducing the collections budget will have a long-term effect for research at the University.

“Our collections are way below our peers now, but you don’t really feel it because it’s spread across all disciplines,” Nutter said. “That one you’ll feel longer down the road because one of the things faculty want when they come to new place is specific journal titles. We can’t buy them all and that’s going to make potential faculty very disappointed.”

Luckily, the University decided not to reduce its collection significantly this year because almost all of the library’s 2012 budget deficit was accounted for by cutting journal articles and other academic texts, according to Nutter.

Another issue that compounded the impact of budget cuts for this year was how the University classified NCSU Libraries. According to Nutter, her department expected between \$577,000 and \$962,000 in budget cuts because it was usually classified as an academic unit. However, for the first time, the library system was considered an administrative unit, making it subject to a larger budget deficit.

“This year was first year we were designated as administrative,” Nutter said. “[The administration] didn’t tell us why we were considered that. My sense is it could have been to reach a certain level of reductions, and they didn’t have enough money elsewhere.”

Nutter said libraries across the state are being underappreciated by state lawmakers, and that the importance of libraries lies in their ability to foster learning, especially due to changes in today’s job market.

“The [state] legislature feels we should educate people for one job, but that just doesn’t work anymore because you’re going to change the places you work and the type of work you do five to 10 times in your career,” Nutter said. “What you really need to be is a lifelong learner that has to ability to learn and find information.”

She added that libraries play a fundamental role in research, and that public colleges and universities are being forced to ignore them due to less funding.

“Historically you see peaks and valleys [in terms of funding for public education], but what I’m seeing is that this is happening all across the country, and the value of education is not being appreciated,” Nutter said. “That’s how this country got ahead of everyone in the world because we were trying to provide education for everyone, and now I’m really worried our country is going to be in a different mode for quite some time. It’s really devastating.”

However, Nutter said she still believes N.C. State, supported by its library system, will emerge as an academic and economic power due to its emphasis on engineering and technology.

“Whenever I came to N.C. State, I thought, ‘in the next century this institution will be the one to lead the state,’” Nutter said. “Our students are so smart and service-orientated that it would be a tragedy for them not to have equal access to resources compared to UNC Chapel Hill and Duke. I knew that science and engineering were the fields that would really make a difference. In the past you had bankers, lawyers and doctors drive economy, but that’s not the case anymore.”