

**APPENDIX A.1** – State of the Libraries in Preparation for “Academic Support” section of 1998 Middle States Review

April 11, 1998  
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We intend the following document to represent not the revealed wisdom of a single definitive voice, but to represent a conversation on how best to integrate Library services into the mission of Bryn Mawr College. Several disparate, sometimes conflicting voices can be heard in these pages, but it is our hope that allowing such a cacophony will ultimately lead to a richer understanding of the themes behind the words. We have refrained from integrating the various voices at this point, and hope to have a chance to recast the entire section in harmony.

**Middle States Draft for the April 15th Deadline of the Academic Support Committee**

**The Libraries**

Libraries have always been characterized as the heart of all academic enterprises, but the heart as an essential, functional organ, less as an animated and animating one. Chambered repositories of discipline-based information, quiet vessels of solitary contemplation, the libraries of colleges and universities stood for all that was best in supporting the life of the mind, the shuttered place where the acts of learning were completed in the form of reading and research that was initiated in the classroom or the faculty office. The library was best that most unerringly reacted to the changing (or unchanging) fashions of the curriculum, having in place the materials that supported the teaching and research needs of faculty and students. The very best library was practically invisible: it responded silently and efficiently to all requests for information and delivered the information quickly in the proper (print) form to the reader, client, user. Quietly beating heart, it did not so much pump blood to the rest of the college body, but instead developed as a building-delimited life-form, guessing at what the rest of the college-body might want to read, succeeding by adapting its form to its minimal function. This heart beat in silence; its body used it only when necessary.

Time has given us the chance to refresh the body with a heart that actually beats with the critical impulses of the life of the mind: interdisciplinarity, progressive models of education, integrative strategies for learning and doing, thinking and acting. That change has in the last five years embodied itself in libraries as a web, a web that allows us to break free of some of the straitened ways that colleges and universities have thought about what it is that they do. Books and periodicals are now just two parts of a panoply of information, just one of many technologies of knowledge which require a rethinking of what it is that constitutes reading, academic disciplines, teaching, learning and research. We cannot imagine the extent of the insights this new way of thinking about human knowledge might be, but the first fruits of web-based teaching and learning are pointing towards a reintegration of the heart of the college with its constituent parts. In the next five years the library

will succeed best that reaches beyond its building into the world of faculty and student, helping to shape the shared aims of learning and teaching.

Years of being severed from the larger world of the College have allowed the library to grow and develop a separate existence, one that touched the academic enterprise at important points, but did not synchronize with the larger project of the College. Funded generously, it developed impressively in its technical capacities to catalog books and in the quantity of its holdings of books and of special collections. The new integrated world of learning and teaching provides an unprecedented opportunity to reallocate resources, to realign the library with the larger academic mission and to reintegrate it into the College, as a building, as a collection of resources, as a teaching tool. This realignment would take as its premise that the new world of the College is one in which the library would be part of a rededication to the purpose of a Bryn Mawr education, that learning in the modern world means re-examining reading and thinking as student and librarian and faculty member reinvestigate what constitutes human knowledge.

Two specific visions animate the desire for realignment: that the library must again become an active part of the teaching mission of the College and that what constitutes the searching, selecting, organizing and presenting, i.e., the creation of knowledge must be redefined by the College. To the first vision, we propose that the library move beyond its walls and cooperate with faculty and computer professionals in bringing to the classroom and to the faculty office the materials that will constitute the body of the curriculum and the ways of looking at that body that problematizes and elucidates information. One could perhaps see this as bibliographic instruction redefined: how the library helps in the crucial task of teaching our students about the nature of the information – text-based, visual, interactive – that constitutes the ground upon which their college education is built. The second vision is assumed in the first one: that we start the process of moving away from such hoary perennials as how many periodical subscriptions we do not have towards the basic question of what we need to have and in what form to make teaching and learning possible. How many periodicals we have and do not have will always be an important question to ask, as important as what library buildings should be able to do for the campus as a whole, but to answer those questions correctly we need to reexamine the uses to which these academic services are dedicated. We want the library to become an animating force, working in an active, dynamic system, connected to all of the College, shaping and being shaped by its teaching mission.