

# **Relationship between Library Collections and the Recruitment and Retention of Faculty at UT Austin**

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## **I. Overview**

This study explores the role that library collections play in the career decisions of University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) faculty that were recently hired or promoted. The University of Texas Libraries' (UT Libraries) project team initiated this study in support of the Association for Research Libraries' Research Library Impact Pilots. It focuses on the Collections area of the Impact Framework and tackles the research question: (How) do the library's collections play a role in attracting and retaining top researchers and faculty to the institution?<sup>1</sup> The project team reviewed relevant literature, consulted local campus wide surveys and reports, and learned that the relationship between libraries, their collections, and the specific and affective drivers of faculty career decisions had not previously been studied in depth. The project team then designed a localized study using a survey and interviews to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. While the research was limited to one university, the results could be used to nuance and articulate understandings about the impact of library collections on the recruitment and retention of faculty members at similar research-intensive universities. Furthermore, the findings can help libraries attend to user needs and appropriately allocate resources moving forward.

## **II. Background Research**

Most university administrators assert that the university library exists to support the research and teaching needs of the faculty and student learning. An abundance of literature exists on both these needs and the effectiveness of any library response. Topics particularly well documented include analyses of return on investment, questions surrounding faculty expectations and satisfaction, and how best to recruit and retain faculty members. However, the project team found very little overlap between these two questions—the need for libraries to support faculty and the need for universities to recruit and retain them—let alone the role of library collections in that overlapping space. This same gap was discovered within the UT Austin context after examining local strategic plans, task force reports, and campus wide survey results.

### **II.1 Return on Investment**

The need for academic libraries to articulate their value within higher education has instigated many studies to address the benefit of general investment in the library through examining relationships to reputation and faculty productivity. Studies found that there were positive correlations between institutional investments in libraries and faculty productivity.<sup>2</sup> Conclusions from studies that sought to measure the return on investment for each dollar spent on libraries indicate that there are correlations between an institution's investment in libraries and research productivity, as well as reputational scores. These findings might be linked to faculty recruitment and retention, but this linkage is inferred rather than explicit.<sup>3</sup> One study determined that given the small portion of the average university budget's allocated to the library, "the contribution of the library is disproportionately high relative to its cost to the institution."<sup>4</sup>

### **II.2 Faculty Expectations and Satisfaction**

When discussing the value library collections provide to their institutions, user perceptions around collections are explored with great frequency. Multiple studies found that user satisfaction with library collections revolve around user needs, information resource availability, ease of discoverability and

access, as well as expectations that come from the size and/or funding level of the academic library.<sup>5</sup> To positively shape user satisfaction, libraries must not only understand user needs but also must meet and exceed them by having the desired information at hand and providing easy user access, which requires libraries to focus their investments on information resources and access mechanisms.<sup>6</sup> However, this issue is complicated by library users tending to place higher expectations for collections on larger, better funded research libraries. These increased expectations for information resource availability and accessibility are not similarly translated into higher levels of satisfaction.<sup>7</sup> Larger library funding allocations could have a positive impact on bridging user expectations and satisfaction. However, additional factors that are not easily quantified or the tension between the librarian versus user perspective of a collection may also be at play in preventing libraries from satisfying user expectations.<sup>8</sup>

### **II.3 Recruitment and Retention**

While faculty recruitment and retention are long-standing points of concern for universities, there is little consensus about the factors that draw faculty to a particular university and the factors that influence their intention to stay.<sup>9</sup> One generally agreed upon suggestion is that institutional and disciplinary contexts matter.<sup>10</sup> Policies, practices, and resources vary widely across institutions, and the draw of the private sector makes competing for talent and expertise more difficult in some fields than others. Consequently, studies that look at faculty retention across institutions and disciplines find the effect of many tracked characteristics to be weak. While seniority or career length, salary, tenure status, and external markets or opportunities are the factors that most consistently show an effect across relevant studies, the consistency and strength of these findings varies.<sup>11</sup> Factors unrelated to salary — such as the institution’s reputation, overall climate, offer of one-time and ongoing research and equipment assistance, and possession of collaborative and supportive working relationships — often influence faculty decisions to accept and remain in academic positions.<sup>12</sup>

The explicit role of libraries has rarely been addressed in the empirical literature about faculty recruitment and retention. When libraries do appear, they tend to be lumped into broader categories about institutional resources or support, alongside labs, equipment, and support staff. While it is clear that such resources matter a great deal in terms of faculty satisfaction, morale, and quality of work life, they ultimately do not appear to be key factors in decisions to take or remain in a specific position.<sup>13</sup> Just one study exists that directly investigates potential connections between collections and career decisions of faculty. In their 1987 study, “The Influence of Library Resources on Faculty Recruitment and Retention,” Cluff and Murrah used quantitative surveying to explicitly probe the relationship between library collections and the recruitment of faculty at four Association of Research Libraries’ institutions in Texas.<sup>14</sup> In their analysis, they discovered that faculty believe library collections to be critical to their professional success but those same resources are not impactful on their decision making to come to or to stay at an institution. They expect and take for granted that large, well-funded universities will have large, well-resourced libraries that meet their needs.

### **II.4 UT Austin Context: Strategic Planning and Task Force Documents**

The project team consulted multiple internal reports submitted since 2015 and reviewed recent campus wide task forces which were charged to reflect on the state of UT Libraries and to make future-leaning recommendations.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the reports, the importance of preserving and growing local collections, maintaining and innovating spaces to house and showcase collections, and strategies for effective discovery of, and access to collections were highlighted. Only a couple of these reports addressed the subject of this study, namely the connection between faculty expectations, collections, and recruitment and retention. For example, one provided anecdotal evidence on the importance of collections to faculty, including such statements that collections are “one of the key reasons I’m still here,” “a key element in my decision to come to UT,” and that they “made me decide against moving to another institution.”<sup>16</sup> Others shared concerns “that a diminished or disappeared [library] would negatively affect the

recruitment and retention of undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty” and that the proximity of the physical collections is key to the community.<sup>17</sup>

## **II.5 UT Austin Context: Campus Wide Faculty Surveys**

The project team also reviewed three recent campus wide surveys — the 2016 LibQual+®

Survey, 2017 COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey, and 2018 Ithaka S+R Survey—to understand existing faculty attitudes and perceptions towards UT Libraries’ collections. These surveys showed that faculty have the highest desires for collection service levels and about 84% of faculty indicated they were satisfied with library resources.<sup>18</sup> Faculty expressed that library collections routinely serve as an important resource that play a crucial role in their research and teaching activities. As such, faculty stated it was important that UT Libraries continue to pay for needed information resources, operate as a repository of resources, and serve as a research starting point for locating information.<sup>19</sup> While most aspects of UT Libraries’ collections exceed the “minimum acceptable service level,” faculty responses on certain elements conveyed the largest gap between the “perceived service performance” and the “desired service level” of the collections.<sup>20</sup> Considering that almost 29% of surveyed faculty have sought an outside job offer and a little over 15% of surveyed faculty have received an outside job offer in the past several years, this large incongruence between the perceived performance of UT Libraries’ collections and the desired quality for the collection has the potential to impact faculty retention.<sup>21</sup>

## **III. Research Methodology**

Data were gathered through two processes: an online survey and in-person, semi-structured interviews. This study’s methodology and survey and interview questions were developed based on the Cluff and Murrah study and Ithaka S+R Research Support Services Program analyses of discipline-based collections and research trends, issues, and support needs and challenges.<sup>22</sup> Questions were also informed by trends identified in the literature that indicate that discipline and research methodologies matter. The survey and interview questions are openly shared in the Texas Data Repository, along with supporting materials and anonymized data from this study.<sup>23</sup>

The online survey was sent to the list of UT Austin faculty members hired or promoted within the past five years (2013–2018) as identified by UT’s Office of Academic Personnel Services. The project team intentionally designed the survey tool to be quick, have all answers be optional, and keep responses anonymous unless respondents wished to make themselves known. The survey was distributed via individual emails with data gathered through Qualtrics.

In-person, semi-structured interviews were completed in 60 minutes or less and took place in the participants’ primary workspaces on campus. Due to the localized nature of this study and the lack of intent to generalize the findings, purposive sampling was employed to select a diverse group of interview participants from the lists of recently hired or promoted faculty. To ensure a reasonable range of experiences and opinions, rather than a representative sample, were gathered, faculty were recruited for interviews based on academic rank and discipline. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and the resulting data were subsequently coded and analyzed using an open-coding, grounded theory approach.<sup>24</sup> Each team member independently coded the interview transcriptions and survey comments. The team then came together to compare and align those independently generated codes into broader categories and to explore the relationships among them as well as with the rest of the survey data. Attention during coding and analysis was focused on what the interviewees identified as their understanding and use of library collections, as well as their career-based decision-making processes.

## IV. Findings

In October 2019, the survey was distributed to 991 newly recruited and promoted faculty and received 284 responses, for a response rate of 29%. From October to December 2019, interviews were conducted with 13 faculty distributed across disciplines (arts & humanities, social sciences, and STEM) and rank (assistant, associate, and full professors) without overlap in departments to ensure a diversity of viewpoints.<sup>25</sup> During the coding process, four overarching themes emerged: access to collections is a priority, assumptions about collections are widespread, local special collections are deeply impactful to certain faculty, and factors that influence recruitment and retention are generally personal and multifaceted. Interview excerpts and survey comments associated with these themes were then examined for deeper analysis and discussion. Findings within each theme explore differences across disciplines and research methodologies, given that previous studies found variations in these areas when it comes to recruitment and retention.

### IV.1 Access to Collections is a Priority

While distinctions between access to collections and collections themselves are clear to librarians, faculty do not make the same delineations. Quantitative understandings about access are not forthcoming in the research at hand, as the survey did not include questions about access. However, qualitative understandings abound as both interview responses and survey comments were explicit in the need for immediate, preferably unmediated access to information, be it physical or online. Access is ownership and ownership should mean seamless, efficient access. Unencumbered access to a wide range of materials, both physical and electronic, is important to faculty across disciplines. Faculty in STEM and social sciences fields in particular declared that immediate access to online materials was critical to their research. Appeals to the importance of serendipitous discovery through physical browsing in the stacks was mentioned by many faculty members (especially those in the arts and humanities), some even going so far as to invoke an emotional, “refreshing feeling” that can come when one can “go and look at the books.”

Interrupted access is not ideal access. While faculty appreciate service efficiency and are willing to use interlibrary loan or to request materials from off-site storage, they do not like having to do so. It changes their workflows, causes delays, and ultimately, irritates them. They repeatedly conveyed a sense of “frustration,” “inconvenience,” and “disappointment” when having to request and wait for materials from other locations, calling such practices “unacceptable for a Research 1 institution.” However, some declared that coming to work at a large institution such as UT Austin was a welcome change from previous employing institutions where they were required to use interlibrary loan services frequently. Ultimately, if the library cannot provide efficient access, faculty made it clear they go elsewhere to gain access to materials, whether it be to previous institutions, peer networks, social media, and even sites of pirated material.

**Table IV-1. Quotes from faculty members about their thoughts on access to library collections**

| <i>Discipline Area</i> | <i>Quote</i>  |
|------------------------|---|
| Arts & Humanities      | “In the humanities, the libraries are laboratories... Not all of us just simply use online sources. If you go into the library, you’re always going to stumble across something. So the idea of having a standing, physical collection I think is absolutely fundamental to the methods that we use.” |
| Arts & Humanities      | “Disappointing to have to use off-site storage to recall an item... I tend to need items here and now, not in several days’ time.”  |

| <i>Discipline Area</i> | <i>Quote</i>  |
|------------------------|---|
| Social Sciences        | “I almost exclusively use stuff online. In fact, if it’s not online, unless it seems incredibly pertinent, I will often be like, ‘Well, I guess I’m not going to use that.’”  |
| STEM                   | “I do think [my research has] benefited because of the quickness that I’m typically able to access things.”   |
| STEM                   | “If it takes time... I usually try to find another way of finding the information that I need.”   |
| STEM                   | “Something I like is that we have libraries distributed on campus... So, if I need something in my field there are libraries closer to me if I want to go and touch and see the materials, observe them in person.” |

**IV.2 Assumptions about Collections are Widespread**

While interviews revealed that faculty from all disciplines rely heavily on collections and feel they are foundational to their work, very few mentioned the library as a reason for coming to or remaining at UT Austin. For most surveyed, considering UT Libraries’ collections had not occurred to them during recruitment because they assumed the library would have what they needed (89%). This mindset was particularly common among scientists or social scientists who rely on libraries primarily for secondary sources. Faculty from these communities tend to come from or were trained at other large research institutions, and they imagine their library experiences will translate seamlessly across institutions. The size and reputation of UT Austin engenders an expectation that the institution is capable of and committed to ensuring they will have access to the materials required for their work. For the most part, STEM and social sciences faculty assumptions held true; these faculty members generally emphasized that they were well served by UT Libraries’ collections.

The arts and humanities faculty were much more sensitive to the possibility that some libraries are more able to support their research than others. Faculty from this group were nearly all more likely to consider library collections in their decisions, and they came to UT Austin with fewer unchecked assumptions (82% in arts and humanities versus 96% in STEM assumed the library would already have what they needed). This is particularly true for those whose research depends on special collections. While this community of faculty sang the praises of special collections held at UT Austin, they readily understood that UT Libraries will not have it all. Humanists did, however, mirror their STEM and social sciences colleagues in having shared assumptions that UT Libraries would have a current and comprehensive collection of mainstream, secondary sources. While they were generally pleased, repeatedly appreciating the breadth and depth of UT Libraries’ collections, arts and humanities faculty were more likely share concerns about collection gaps and what those gaps might portend for future research.

**Table IV-2. Survey response counts from faculty members on their library collection assumptions**

| Survey Questions                                      | Overall |    | Arts & Humanities |    | Social Sciences |    | STEM |    | Use Int'l/ Foreign Language Materials |    | Use Archival/ Special Collections |    |
|---|---------|----|-------------------|----|-----------------|----|------|----|---------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|----|
|   | Yes     | No | Yes               | No | Yes             | No | Yes  | No | Yes                                   | No | Yes                               | No |
| Assumed that UT Libraries would have what I needed    | 254     | 30 | 62                | 13 | 90              | 11 | 94   | 5  | 96                                    | 14 | 62                                | 12 |
| Assumed that the UT Libraries would get what I needed | 237     | 45 | 66                | 7  | 89              | 12 | 76   | 23 | 98                                    | 11 | 66                                | 6  |

**Table IV-3. Quotes from faculty members highlighting their library collection assumptions**

| Discipline Area   | Quote   |
|-------------------|---|
| Arts & Humanities | “I do field and archival based research, so it is natural that any given university library would not hold my primary materials.”   |
| Arts & Humanities | “I feel like I am noticing holes... That was not the case five years ago ... If we’re already starting to notice that it means we’re going to have a crisis on our hands in five years”   |
| Social Sciences   | “I will admit, it didn’t even occur me to ask because UT is a top university. The idea that they wouldn’t have what I need seemed crazy.”   |
| Social Sciences   | “At top schools the expectation is just that all these [articles and books] are going to be available... If that were not true, it would be a significant negative.”  |
| STEM              | “I came from an R1 so I just always assumed that was the norm... Although now I know it’s not [the norm] because a lot of my friends ended up at teaching universities and can’t access anything... I just thought that this was what it was everywhere because that’s what it was everywhere I went to school” |
| STEM              | “For us, libraries are something like air; we definitely need it to run the university, but somewhat we assume it is always available.”   |

### **IV.3 Local Special Collections are Deeply Impactful to Certain Faculty**

While many participants shared expectations that current and comprehensive secondary source collections would be on par with other R1 research institutions, several interview participants identified the value of special collections to their research and teaching. Faculty recognized the role of librarians and other faculty who have worked to build these strong aggregations of materials. Other faculty had discovered, and were somewhat surprised by, the depths of the special collections related to their focus areas. Faculty

also identified the significance of international or foreign language materials to their research and teaching. Several faculty members spoke to the need to have robust foreign language materials in the collections. With that said, arts and humanities faculty most clearly articulated the impact of archives, special collections, and international or foreign language materials on their work and to their students.

In addition to UT’s strong network of campus archives and special collections containing materials not readily available at other institutions, unique collections of locally aggregated non-UT materials were also significant. A few faculty members in the arts and humanities and social sciences named specific archives on and in close proximity to campus, identifying these special collections as a major reason why they came to UT Austin. Some faculty members emphasized the value of having multiple collections on campus and nearby to contextualize a broad range of historical documentation from early literature and maps to correspondence and newspapers. In short, the proximity to other libraries and archives containing government documents, local historical records, and specialized collections was recognized as a tangible benefit for research and for engaging students in the research process.

**Table IV-4. Survey response counts from faculty members on their use of special collections**

| Survey Questions  | Overall    |           | Arts & Humanities |           | Social Sciences |           | STEM       |           |
|---|------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
|   | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i>        | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i>      | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |
| Regularly use archives and/or special collections in research or teaching             | 72         | 206       | 44                | 29        | 12              | 38        | 5          | 80        |
| Regularly use international and/or foreign language materials in research or teaching | 108        | 64        | 50                | 25        | 12              | 28        | 26         | 73        |

**Table IV-5. Quotes from faculty members expressing the value of local special collections**

| <i>Discipline Area</i> | <i>Quote</i>  |
|------------------------|---|
| Arts & Humanities      | “I have used the archives at UT in my research for decades. They are the best in the country for what I do, and that was a key reason I agreed to come here.”   |
| Arts & Humanities      | “One of my draws to come here was the collections. And I know [campus archive] is not part of the UT Libraries per se... UT has the second-best collection on [my topic] nationally... we have a really, really rich library system here. And so that was one of my draws.”               |
| Arts & Humanities      | “Was more original work here that would allow me to stay here and I can do work that would take me further as opposed to using stuff that’s highly utilized... I want to train students that are doing original work, and not just sort of combing through the same archives over there.” |
| Social Sciences        | “One of the reasons I wanted to come to UT writ large... was related to special collections.”   |

| <i>Discipline Area</i> | <i>Quote</i>  |
|------------------------|---|
| Social Sciences        | “It is one of those things that gives me pause about going to another place because I’m like, ‘Ugh.’ But the rich resources here and the relationships with a lot of the special collections archivist librarians is... really important to me.”                          |
| Social Sciences        | “The [special collection] library is a very special resource and I appreciate it enormously. Other associated entities such as [online special collection] have international importance and are major components of UT’s broader reputation and scholarly contribution.” |

#### **IV.4 Factors that Influence Recruitment and Retention are Personal and Multifaceted**

In general, most of the faculty surveyed (57%) and nine interviewees stated library collections were not the foremost driver of their decision to come work at the UT Austin. Instead, interviewed faculty cited other factors as taking priority such as family needs, spousal hires, departmental or institutional reputation, salary, geographic location, accessibility of local centers and networks, the institution’s value on both teaching and research, the ability to work with graduate students, and the opportunity to grow an area of study. This sentiment is not surprising given that UT Libraries do not seem to play a prominent role in the hiring process. However, the idea that UT Libraries’ collections do not play a role in the recruitment and retention process at all is simply not true. A sizeable portion of faculty surveyed (42%) stated that the libraries’ collections were a driver in their decision to come work at UT Austin, which was also echoed by four interviewees. This is further supported by the majority of surveyed faculty describing UT Libraries’ collections as important to their research (76%) and teaching (60%) efforts. Moreover, the survey results revealed that the quality of UT Libraries’ collections played a much stronger role in the recruitment decisions of arts and humanities faculty (61%), as well as those employing particular methodological practices (72% of those who regularly use archival and special collections; 61% of those who use foreign language and international materials). In addition, almost half of those surveyed with a disciplinary focus in the social sciences (47%) conveyed that the quality of UT Libraries was a factor in their recruitment decision. These breakdowns are telling as the survey data show UT Libraries was more involved in the hiring process for these faculty than in other areas.

**Table IV-6. Survey response counts from faculty members on their recruitment experience and the role of library collections in their career decisions**

| Survey Questions                           | Overall    |           | Arts & Humanities |           | Social Sciences |           | STEM       |           | Use Int’l/ Foreign Language Materials |           | Use Archival/ Special Collections |           |
|--|------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
|  | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i>        | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i>      | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i>                            | <i>No</i> | <i>Yes</i>                        | <i>No</i> |
| <i>Response Counts</i>                     |            |           |                   |           |                 |           |            |           |                                       |           |                                   |           |
| A library tour was part of my campus visit | 44         | 207       | 32                | 31        | 9               | 85        | 3          | 84        | 27                                    | 70        | 26                                | 44        |
| No tour, but visited library on their own  | 46         | 161       | 14                | 17        | 15              | 70        | 16         | 68        | 27                                    | 43        | 18                                | 26        |

| Survey Questions   | Overall |     | Arts & Humanities |    | Social Sciences |    | STEM |    | Use Int'l/ Foreign Language Materials |    | Use Archival/ Special Collections |    |
|--|---------|-----|-------------------|----|-----------------|----|------|----|---------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------|----|
|  | Yes     | No  | Yes               | No | Yes             | No | Yes  | No | Yes                                   | No | Yes                               | No |
| <i>Response Counts</i>   |         |     |                   |    |                 |    |      |    |                                       |    |                                   |    |
| Given information about UT Libraries                           | 108     | 175 | 43                | 31 | 34              | 67 | 27   | 72 | 57                                    | 53 | 41                                | 33 |
| Opportunity to meet with library personnel                     | 45      | 238 | 29                | 45 | 7               | 94 | 9    | 90 | 30                                    | 80 | 26                                | 48 |
| Reviewed the UT Libraries' website                             | 106     | 177 | 44                | 30 | 32              | 69 | 29   | 70 | 66                                    | 44 | 45                                | 29 |
| UT Libraries factored in my decision to accept UT's offer      | 121     | 163 | 46                | 29 | 47              | 54 | 26   | 73 | 67                                    | 43 | 53                                | 21 |
| I was offered positions elsewhere but declined to go           | 90      | 190 | 22                | 52 | 36              | 65 | 30   | 67 | 42                                    | 66 | 25                                | 49 |
| The library collections <u>were</u> a factor in my decision    | 25      | 65  | 10                | 12 | 10              | 26 | 4    | 26 | 18                                    | 24 | 15                                | 10 |
| I am actively seeking a position at another institution        | 33      | 245 | 13                | 61 | 14              | 86 | 5    | 91 | 18                                    | 90 | 15                                | 58 |
| The library collections <u>will be</u> a factor in my decision | 16      | 15  | 10                | 2  | 5               | 8  | 1    | 4  | 11                                    | 6  | 11                                | 3  |

When looking at retention specifically, many of these same trends and breakdowns hold true when faculty are deciding to stay at or leave UT Austin. Even when faculty have been offered positions elsewhere in the past but have declined to go (32%), the project team observed that the quality of the library collections (either here at UT Austin or the other institution) was not a factor in their decision. Conversely, among those actively seeking a position at another institution (11%), a slight majority of these respondents (52%) reported that the quality of the library collections (either at UT Austin or the other institution) will be a factor in their decision. This break from other patterns observed in the survey and interview data might be an indication that UT Libraries' collections will grow into playing a larger role in the retention of faculty, especially for those working in the arts and humanities and the social sciences (to a degree) or for those regularly using special collections.

Across the board, several interviewees recognized that they had overlooked including the library in their criteria for accepting their offer at UT Austin regardless of its importance. In addition, many faculty expressed how much they do or have come to appreciate UT Libraries. Some faculty expressed that they would consider adding the library and its collections to their criteria if they seek a position elsewhere. Despite this appreciation and recognition of UT Libraries, survey comments and interview responses implied that if the quality of UT Libraries' collections declined or if quick and easy access to library materials was reduced, then this would be a problem that could factor into their career decisions for whether or not to remain at UT Austin.

**Table IV-7. Quotes from faculty members on their reasons to come to or stay at the university**

| <i>Discipline Area</i> | <i>Quote</i>   |
|------------------------|--|
| Arts & Humanities      | “UT Libraries, including both the strength of its collections and the impressive knowledge and expertise of its staff, are absolutely fundamental to why I am at this university. They underpin everything I do as both a researcher and a teacher. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that the libraries are probably the primary reason I am at this university.” |
| Arts & Humanities      | “I just assumed that an R1 library would have a really world class set of collection... I didn't probably look into it as much as I should have. I was just sort of assuming. The fact that it was really important, but maybe... I did less due diligence than I probably should have.”   |
| Social Sciences        | “I just assumed that things would be easily available... here and they have been. I think in terms of recruitment and retention, it would be a significant problem if that weren't true.”  |
| Social Sciences        | “I was a bit ignorant of how impressive the UT Libraries is when I was hired. However, I have since come to appreciate just how important it is. After experiencing the quality of the library and the services the staff provide, I would definitely use the library as a criterion if I were to seek another job elsewhere.”   |
| STEM                   | “My assumption would have been that probably, given the size of the university, that [UT Libraries' collections] would be on the comparable path [to another R1 university], but that is indeed a question that I didn't ask myself. And now actually in hindsight, it's actually a good question that taking that for granted is maybe not the most obvious.”             |
| STEM                   | “I appreciate the libraries a lot more now. I didn't really realize when I started at the institution how many resources there were there in terms of support, in terms of trainings.”   |

## **V. Conclusion: Role of Library Collections in Faculty Career Decisions**

The connection between library collections and faculty decisions to join or remain at an institution was not direct or explicit. Faculty did not have consistent nor shared reference points for what a “collection” is, often equating a collection with the “library” or the “services” offered. Once this collection distinction issue with study participants was overcome, the project team found that the answer in response to the core research question—(How) do the library's collections play a role in attracting and retaining top researchers and faculty to the institution?—is an indirect “yes.” Like Cluff and Murrah's research showed over 30 years ago, faculty believe library resources to be critical to their professional success, productivity, and overall “satisfaction,” but those same resources are not explicitly considered in their decision making to come to or to stay at an institution. Faculty assume that all large, well-funded

universities will have large, well-resourced libraries that meet all their needs. As such, beyond responses from a handful of passionate users, causation was not discovered in this research. Correlation, however, particularly when parsing the intent of the research question and the phrase “play a role,” was certainly observed and well documented.

**Table IV-8. Quotes from faculty members on the role of library collections in their career decisions**

| <i>Discipline Area</i> | <i>Quote</i>  |
|------------------------|---|
| Arts & Humanities      | “It feels like... the lack of attention to the library budget I think is one of the things that indicates to me that the university’s may be not thinking broadly enough about what all is involved in maintaining the success of a research institution”   |
| Arts & Humanities      | “To invest in libraries signals a commitment to the research mission of the university that has far-reaching ripple effects for the international standing and reputation of this institution and therefore for faculty recruitment and retention. If UT wants to remain a place where ‘what starts here changes the world,’ we have to invest in our libraries. It’s that simple. We can’t change the world if we disinvest from our libraries - to disinvest from our libraries is to disinvest in the research mission of our faculty and teaching mission.”   |
| Arts & Humanities      | “The quality of UT Libraries is fundamental to the quality not only of my research but of my general work experience at UT. I have benefited immensely from both the collection and the human resources the libraries offer, and I am concerned that these strengths will be diminished if support for the libraries is not a UT budgeting priority. I am considering going on the market again in the next few years, and one of the factors that will be involved in my decision at that point is whether the university has decided to invest more in the libraries. If it hasn’t, that will be a serious negative in the ‘stay here’ column.” |
| Social Sciences        | “It upsets me as a faculty member to think that the libraries are under any kind of attack to use words that are probably too charged. Or, would be seen as less valuable when they are single handedly the reason that we are here. And I cannot say that strongly enough.”  |
| Social Sciences        | “What might lure me away? What might make me stay? I have to say the resources on campus. And that includes the library.”   |
| STEM                   | “I can talk to you just in general about the resources that we use, like the journals or things like that... the databases... but I honest to God, have no idea what a ‘collection’ is.”  |

Many variables lure faculty to and encourage them to stay at an institution and the research at hand highlighted that decision-making around faculty recruitment and retention is complex. Though, in response to the “how” part of the research question, this study suggests that UT Libraries’ collections, and perhaps the ideas around what those collections represent, may become stronger driving forces in some faculty criteria for future career decisions. Faculty actively seeking positions at another institution reported that the quality of the collections will be a factor as they make decisions to stay or to leave. They recognized that they had perhaps overlooked the libraries in their decision-making criteria for accepting an offer at UT Austin and expressed that they will consider adding this to their criteria if they seek a position at another institution. Faculty suggested that if the quality of and/or access to UT Libraries’ collections declined, this would be a “problem” that could factor into their retention decisions. Furthermore, the growing importance of the symbolic and structural signaling of UT Austin’s

commitment to and investment in UT Libraries was highlighted throughout this research. Many faculty members invoked the essential value libraries provide for both teaching and research endeavors and they expressed concern around this value being diminished if UT Libraries are not made a budgeting priority. Others stated that they perceived a direct link between investment in UT Libraries and UT Austin's overall research and teaching mission. Finally, faculty went as far to say that if they do not see more investment in the libraries then that will be a significant factor in their personal career decisions of whether or not to remain at the university. For these faculty members, the most visible symbol of this investment was in the collections as they repeatedly equated libraries with their collections.

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## Endnotes

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