

**Music Library Advocacy Task Force**

**Final Report**

**April 24, 2018**

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## 1. Introduction

The recent decision by the University of Texas at Austin to reverse the planned closure of their Fine Arts Library illustrates the power of well-coordinated advocacy. This happy outcome results from mobilizing passion, imagination, and supporting data from a broad coalition of stakeholders. While individual MLA members have long played the role of music library advocate at their home institutions, MLA as an organization has lagged in offering resources and support in this area.

In September 2014 MLA created an online forum intended to gather ideas about music library advocacy, for inclusion in a white paper on the topic. The forum received little attention and was soon discontinued, and the proposed white paper never materialized. Still, calls for MLA to help members advocate for their collections and services continue to be heard. In their 2015 Strategic Action Plan, the Board proposed a new online advocacy forum, to be administered by the Newsletter Editor. The plan envisions a central location where “individual members and various MLA groups can highlight their efforts as well as identify issues needing attention.”<sup>1</sup>

Around the same time, Lisa Shiota, whose own music library advocacy began with a pre-conference workshop in 2014, was reaching out to colleagues with a similar interest. Out of these informal discussions came the Music Library Advocacy Task Force, a group whose members are employed at conservatory, research, college, and public libraries. The Task Force received Board approval in July 2016, with the charge of preparing the ground for the online advocacy forum. Its principal activity has been the creation of a survey to learn how our members view music library

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<sup>1</sup> Music Library Association, “2015 Action: Create an Advocacy Forum,” *MLA Strategic Plan 2011: Action Plan for 2015* (adopted February 2015). [www.musiclibraryassoc.org/resource/resmgr/Docs/2015\\_Strategic\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/resource/resmgr/Docs/2015_Strategic_Action_Plan.pdf).

advocacy: what it means, what issues it should address, and how we can most effectively communicate about it.

The Task Force compiled a ten-question, anonymous survey and submitted it to the Board in November 2016; after addressing a minor concern, it received approval on 19 December of that year. Also in December 2016, IAML announced their own music library advocacy survey (the Task Force found the two surveys sufficiently differentiated to run concurrently).<sup>2</sup> MLA's survey was advertised on MLA-L beginning on 25 January 2017, and it remained open through 31 March, receiving a total of 106 responses. The Task Force presented preliminary survey results at the national MLA meeting in Portland, OR, on 1 February 2018. Highlights of the ensuing audience discussion appear in Appendix 2.

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<sup>2</sup> Upon learning about MLA's survey, IAML's Advocacy Committee chair Anna Pensaert invited Task Force chair Linda Fairtile to act as an informal liaison to her group. After consulting with MLA President Michael Rogan and President-elect Mark McKnight, Fairtile agreed to serve in this capacity for the duration of the Task Force's existence.

## 2.1 Survey Results: Defining Advocacy

In order to have a meaningful conversation, key terms must first be defined, so our survey asked respondents to describe what music library advocacy means to them. This was a free-text question, which received many thoughtful and detailed answers. Common themes that emerged were:

- **Demonstrating the value of music collections and related services**

Many people wrote about communicating value to music faculty members, students, musicians, and researchers, as well as to related library associations, integrated library systems companies, publishers of electronic resources, and the larger community. Survey respondents put special emphasis on the value of the music library to the greater library system, and on the music library's role in education and the preservation of cultural heritage.

- **Communicating the discipline's unique needs**

Several people mentioned the formats of materials and their metadata that are unique to music, and the need for a dedicated space and expert music subject specialists to properly process, build, curate, and maintain collections, as well as to provide access, quality reference, and research assistance. Some noted the need for developing inclusive practices and for working with other library units and subjects, "advocating for the importance of the arts as an area of study, expression, and response to current events."

- **Increasing our influence with decision makers**

Many asserted the urgency of actively involving music specialists in the decision-making process with regard to their collections and services, and also to the larger library system and music librarianship as a profession. Institutional administrators were most often cited as entities that need to hear our voice, but others also mentioned legislators, library vendors, and funders.

- **Pursuing funding**

Financial support is needed to continue meeting the needs of the library and its users, and to expand collections and services into the future.

Respondents were then asked three questions about the perceived need for music library advocacy, as they understand the term:

**Is there a need for music library advocacy in general?**

- Yes: 94.29%
- No: 1.90%
- Don't know: 3.81%

**Is there a need for music library advocacy at your institution?**

- Yes: 82.86%
- No: 8.57%
- Don't know: 8.57%

**If you feel that music library advocacy is needed, what are your top three reasons for doing so?**

The answers to this free-text question naturally parallel the one that asked respondents to define music library advocacy. The most popular themes that emerged were:

- To promote collections and services within/beyond our usual constituencies
- To promote the value of music information specialists
- To address budget and funding concerns
- To address threats of closing a branch library or losing space
- To raise awareness of the unique needs of music users and materials
- To advocate for music or for the arts and humanities in general

## 2.2 Survey Results: Specific Concerns and Ideas

Another survey question asked for specific concerns or ideas related to music library advocacy.

Respondents tended to focus on *either* concerns *or* ideas, or referred to answers already given in the survey, or simply gave no answer at all. Many of the concerns expressed in the free-text responses focused on three areas:

- **Preservation of resources (especially print, and also archives)**

One respondent worried about potentially “losing an appreciation for the in-house music collection and how it can enhance music learning and performance,” while another suggested aggregating data to show that the use of music materials is not declining.

- **Staffing (cuts, downgrades and/or replacement of subject specialists)**

With regard to staffing, respondents essentially worried about two things: the devaluing of the profession and the disappearance of the subject specialist, either through replacement by generalists or paraprofessionals, or due to budget cuts. Some also expressed worry that the focus of any advocacy risks being too narrow and too internal, suggesting that we broaden our advocacy conversation to include campus administrations AND national and international organizations, including non-music library entities wherever possible, as well as all fields of librarianship.

- **Budget and/or space constraints**

Concerns were expressed in terms of maintaining current funding levels and/or spaces, as well as increasing them to meet future needs. In some cases, competition with other library or institutional units impacts the availability of funds and/or space.

On a positive note, there were many more ideas than complaints -- more hope than despair! Four representative categories are:

- **Identifying specific advocacy tools**

Suggestions in this category included collecting and promoting advocacy resources, such as a clearing house of formal reports and aggregated data, as well as devising methods and channels

of communication, such as face-to-face meetings and group forums. One person proposed writing a formal report about/for the sake of NASM, to be made available on the MLA website.

- **Collaborating with other organizations facing similar concerns**

Many urged seeking help from or working with ALA, CMS, IAML, and regional organizations, as well as other departments within our home institutions that may have already developed solutions that they could share.

- **Identifying and making use of advocates from within our own ranks**

Some respondents pointed out that staff in less visible departments have to struggle for recognition *within* the music library, as well as beyond it. “The advocacy needs of music libraries cross all fields of librarianship, from cataloging to stacks management, from reference and instruction to circulation.”

- **Increasing communication, particularly within non-music environments**

A common thread in this category concerned developing the ability to demonstrate the unique qualities of music collections and their users to people outside our discipline. This theme parallels advocating for music study in general, as one respondent stressed the importance of communicating “how we support music curricula [and in turn,] support music fluencies, which support general cognitive development and critical thinking.” In addition, it is vital that MLIS candidates with an interest in music libraries “continue to receive broad exposure to all the basic elements of librarianship in a manner that will enable them to effectively communicate and collaborate across all library departments and divisions.”

## 2.3 Survey Results: Communicating about Advocacy

While MLA is committed to creating an online advocacy forum led by the Newsletter Editor, large-group communication about vital issues often benefits from a multi-modal approach. Therefore, our survey asked for feedback about additional methods of discussing issues related to music library advocacy, first as a multiple-choice question, and then through free-text comments:

### **How would you prefer to communicate about issues related to music library advocacy?**

*(Since it was possible to select more than one response to this question, actual totals are given, rather than percentages)*

- Face-to-face discussions (chapter and/or national MLA meetings): 82
- Email listserv: 75
- Forum on MLA website: 59
- Social media (private Facebook group, etc): 47

Free-text comments included:

- No more discussion groups that only meet once a year to talk about conference programs, please!
- Face-to-face discussions are great, but not everyone can make them.
- It would be good to have an anonymous or secure option. People facing these issues may have concerns about job security.
- I don't object to a forum on the MLA website, but I need the postings/notices to come to \*something\* that I already check regularly, such as e-mail or Facebook.
- Please, no more Facebook groups!

### 3. Conclusions

It is clear from the responses to our survey, as well as recent discussions on MLA-L, that music library advocacy is a hot topic. Members are concerned about the future of music collections, their users, and their staffs, and are looking to MLA for support. While the new online discussion forum will no doubt receive more attention than its 2014 predecessor, additional modes of communication are also needed. Of course, creating new venues for discussion requires additional resources, time, and personnel to manage them. There may already be existing units within MLA that are suited to facilitating these opportunities, and we are confident that their efforts will be justified.

Our survey respondents' enthusiasm for advocacy is driven by a desire to meet users' needs, leverage subject expertise, respond to changes in the landscape, and responsibly manage existing resources. But recognizing that some issues affect the entire music library community, while others are more relevant to subsets of the membership, we built into our survey the potential to map demographic information onto specific advocacy concerns. Although sophisticated analysis of our survey data is beyond the scope of this Task Force, even a rudimentary examination offers a means to direct the Association's efforts towards areas of greatest need: identifying the top concerns of members in particular professional situations may suggest, for example, creating interest groups focused on communicating the unique needs of music users at consolidated academic libraries, training music library staff to communicate with their generalist supervisors, or educating the broader community about public library music collections.

21<sup>st</sup>-century music libraries face many challenges that reflect our culture at large. The preference for ease of access over quality, the devaluation of expertise, declining appreciation for the

arts, and ever-present budget concerns all influence how we build our collections and serve our users. While resisting the temptation to maintain practices that have outlived their usefulness, we must unite our voices in support of library resources and services that foster a humane, educated, and thriving society.

## 4. Recommendations

Based on our survey results and subsequent discussions, the Music Library Advocacy Task Force makes eight recommendations to the Association:

1. Create a standing committee dedicated to music library advocacy.
2. Further explore the nexus of demographic data and advocacy concerns collected in the Music Library Advocacy Survey in order to identify potential areas of focus.
3. Host an online clearing house of advocacy documents (reports, usage data, case studies, talking points, elevator speeches, etc.) that members and others can adapt for use at their home institutions.
4. Prepare a brochure, and other materials for public distribution, addressing the question “Why do we need a music librarian?”
5. Work with related societies and professional associations (IAML, CMS, NASM, AMS, SEM, etc.) to draft joint statements or resolutions on issues pertaining to music library advocacy.
6. Explore additional venues to facilitate communication about music library advocacy, including options that permit anonymous participation.
7. Make advocacy the theme of an upcoming national meeting, with a pre-conference workshop on a practical topic such as communicating effectively with administrators outside our field.
8. Recommend that library school curricula recognize library advocacy as an essential professional competency.

## Appendix 1: Survey Demographics

The music library advocacy survey began with four multiple-choice questions with the potential to reveal correlations between demographics and specific advocacy concerns. Our respondents answered as follows:

### Which of the following best describes your institution?

- Academic Library: 86.8%
- Public Library: 7.5%
- Other: 5.7% (incl. special library, museum, military band, private school, vendor)

### Which of the following best describes the space that houses your music library or collection?

- Shared Library Building: 50%
- Shared Academic Building: 33.9%
- Dedicated Music Library Building: 9.4%
- Other: 6.7% (incl. archives building, music library with classrooms, online collection only)

### Which of the following best describes your administrative model?<sup>3</sup>

- Music Library/Collection Reports to a Librarian (not a music specialist): 52.4%
- Music Library/Collection Reports to an Administrator (not a librarian): 42.6%
- Music library/collection reports to a faculty member: 5%

### Which of the following describe the staff at your music library or collection?

*Since it was possible to select more than one response to this question, actual totals are given, rather than percentages.*

- Professional staff: 90 responses
- Paraprofessional staff: 85 responses
- Student workers: 82 responses
- Unpaid volunteers: 15 responses
- Other: incl. sole practitioner; staff with an additional assignment to the music library

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<sup>3</sup> The wording of this question may have inadvertently caused some confusion. We hoped to learn who, *outside* the music library or collection, has administrative responsibility for it. Several responses described internal reporting lines, and thus were omitted from the results. A few free-text responses aligned with one of the multiple-choice options and were included in the relevant totals.

## Appendix 2: Discussion after the Portland Presentation

On 1 February 2018 the Music Library Advocacy Task Force presented their preliminary findings during a session of the annual MLA meeting in Portland, OR. After the presentation, the floor was opened up for discussion, and the following bullet points represent a sample of the topics that were raised:

- Request repository for resources - put on MLA website
- Internal vs. external awareness [within institution vs. without? Within library vs. rest of campus?]
- Nationwide promotion of the profession/association: catchphrase? Brand consultant? Posters/ads/video, testimonials, endorsement by celebrities? [like the ALA Read campaign]
- “every library is different” – “however, there are more things in common than different”
- UT Austin - talk of putting collection in storage, patrons would need to request items, takes 72 hours to retrieve and deliver
- Ask for engagement with the new ALA Executive Director
- ALA Midwinter- “ the conversation starts here”
- IAML Advocacy
- Dialogue with AMS
- NASM accreditation
- STEM Collaboration [within institution]
- Data-driven- evidence of worth