March 4, 2015

To: Claude Steele, Executive Vice-Chancellor & Provost
From: Senate Library Committee
Re: Library Budget, fiscal year 2015-16

The Senate Library Committee has learned, with concern and some dismay, of current planning regarding the Library Budget for the upcoming fiscal year (2015-16) and beyond. Projected cuts of as much as 4% ($1,860,000, for 2015-16), and a 3% mandated increase for staff to be absorbed by the staff-intensive Library, appear to erode efforts ongoing since 2012--on the part of faculty, the university administration, and library administration--to reverse damage accrued over a decade of declining campus support for this key shared resource. In 2013 the Commission on the Future of the UC Berkeley Library documented the critical need for a “serious strategy of major reinvestment” (p. 7), a need recognized and endorsed by then-Provost Breslauer, just over a year ago. (Attachment 1)

Formed in response to faculty concern over plans for crisis-precipitated library reorganization in September 2012 (and co-chaired by a member of the Administration), the Commission reported in October 2013, concluding emphatically that “there should be no higher priority for campus investment and no greater responsibility for the Campus Administration and the Academic Senate than the effective stewardship of the Library” (p. 7). Campus support for the Library had shrunk (25% of the staff were gone, and collections budgets had plateaued just as the cost of digital subscriptions, especially in the STEM disciplines, skyrocketed). The Commission carefully documented the scope of the Library’s financial straits and accordingly recommended a one-time expenditure of $5,000,000 to rectify shortfalls in collection funding, a permanent annual budgetary increase of $5,000,000 for collections (while also noting the need for another $1,5000,000 annually), and an annual increase of $6,500,000 in staff budget to rebuild the depleted ranks of Professional Librarians and proportionate support staff. In January 2014, Executive Vice-Chancellor & Provost Breslauer committed $3,000,000 annually from the Chancellor’s discretionary fund, in addition to $2,600,000 from other sources (including faculty personal research funds), annually, to help rectify the damage done to collections and staffing budgets during the Recession, and to help stabilize the precipitous fall of UCB’s Library’s rankings by the Association of Research Libraries.¹

Current plans would therefore seem to portend a damaging retreat from an agreement that was only a partial solution to a well-studied and well-recognized crisis. Present plans seem to suggest the abandonment of the Commission’s call and the Administration’s agreement to “take immediate action to reverse a decade of declining library resources and restore the Library budget to a level commensurate with the stature of the institution and consistent with its mandate to achieve comprehensive academic excellence” (p. 16). Berkeley faculty have in the past been very successful at obtaining lucrative grants and in attracting the most competitive new hires and students, but these votes of confidence are predicated on the institution providing materials and services to enable excellent research and teaching, most prominently a well-respected and appropriately-funded library.² Defunding the Library will result in further decline in our ARL ranking, will put our ability to secure faculty research grants at risk, and will lower the rankings of our graduate programs, as all of these key indicators are tied to institutional investment in this central common good--Library resources and staff.³ The Senate Library Committee, mindful of Berkeley’s reputation and the future of the institution, underscores the Commission’s
commitment to that mandate for excellence and encourages the administration to stabilize and increase rather than decrease funding to this our most critical shared resource.

1Ranked 4th in overall Library Investment Index in 2007, UCBerkeley dropped to 7th in 2013 (the latest figures available), behind our peers, but also behind Toronto and Penn State. In that report UCBs crucial Material Expenditures were half those of Harvard and Yale, and ranked us 14th behind Toronto and Texas A&M as well as peer institutions. (see Commission Report p. 14 and http://publications.arl.org/ARL-Statistics-2012–2013/47)

2The International Area Centers at Berkeley, for instance, are awarded Title VI National Resource Center status by the US Department of Education partly on the strength of their world area library collections. So failure to stay competitive in this area would certainly jeopardize our collective National Resource Center status.

3In ranking graduate programs, the National Research Council evaluates Library resources. Its most recent report notes, for instance, that “The relatively low ratings in . . . [some departments in some institutions] may indicate inadequate library facilities or inadequate support of other scholarly infrastructure.” (p. 119)