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Remarks at Friends of Morris Library Gala Dinner
September 10, 2011
David Carlson, Dean

Each year at this event, I get to steal a few minutes from our speaker to give a brief update on the Library over the past year. I enjoy this opportunity because, first of all, this audience is filled with our friends and supporters so it's a pleasure to give you an update each year on progress in the Library, however brief. Second, it is a unique opportunity for me to pause and reflect on the past year. But it also a frustrating challenge. In the five or ten minutes I have, I cannot possibly capture all the energy, vigor, progress and challenges that have made up this past year at Morris Library.

So, as I reflected on my remarks, there was a theme I could not escape. It entered my mind like an Abba song from the 70's and just would not leave. It is a theme of two contrasts. The first contrast is the progress we have made this year in planning and anticipating our future through a library strategic planning process. Juxtaposing our planning efforts is the other contrast-- the unplanned events and developments – the surprises – that have characterized this past year. Of course, surprises are always welcome but this year we have had several that have been as delightful as they have been surprising. But let's begin with the planning side.

This past year, we have been engaged in a strategic planning effort. We had a plan developed some six years ago that held up well and we did not want to re-write it from the ground up, but the need for something more than an update on seemed necessary and appropriate. One of the most important initiatives within our planning effort was the deployment of a vetted survey tool from the Association of Research Libraries, ARL, called LibQual+. Several thousand faculty and staff from across campus were invited to complete the survey and the results we received were very interesting and insightful.

In my early versions of this talk I had developed a presentation that showed you some of the various radar charts from the survey complete with some explanation of the results... But the more I thought about it, the more I thought that this was just a bit much after a relaxing dinner and several glasses of wine. So, I'm not going to put up any radar charts. However, we did get a lot of very useful data from this survey both in terms of the structured questions as well as the free-form text comments.

Supplementing the Libqual+ survey we also conducted several focus group sessions with staff from all over the library and these meetings gave us a wonderful set of ideas and suggestions to consider.

After we gathered all this data, the strategic planning committee met and we developed five key areas in which we wanted to develop strategies for our new strategic plan. I have put them up in this slide. For each area, the committee developed a brief paragraph that summarized the area concept. Here is the text that was developed for the Facilities and Technology area to give you a sense of these descriptions.

We are now at the point in the planning process where I am meeting with five smaller subgroups in each of the five areas to develop specific strategies that we want to pursue in the next three to five years. The

process is going well and I am confident that at next year's dinner we will be able to share our new plan with you.

I hope that gives you some insight into our planning efforts and the analysis we have done in support of it. So, that represents the "planning" side of my talk. Planning is important, of course, but no matter how much planning you do there will always be the surprises and the unanticipated. As I said earlier, surprises are not always of the welcome variety but as I reflected back on the past year in preparation for my remarks this evening, there were two delightful surprises that I wanted to share with you.

The first surprise: a delightful discovery. On August 19, just three weeks ago, Pamela Hackbart-Dean our Director of Special Collections sent out an email to all library staff announcing that in their ongoing efforts to catalog our rare books, there was a discovery. Our rare books cataloger, Ann Myers, discovered a book with the title *Descriptionis Ptolemaicae augmentum, siue Occidentis notitia*. The book was published in Belgium by Jean Bogard in 1597. This book is the earliest atlas of the New World, and was published as an addition to Ptolemy's geography. The copy that Ms. Myers found in our collection is the first edition, first issue of this singular work. The atlas is credited with dispelling many misconceptions about the New World. There are 19 double page engraved maps, depicting different areas of North, Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean islands. Only three other libraries in the world (that we know of) have a copy of this issue of the atlas.

Our Map Librarian, Harry Davis, did a little research and found that an antiquarian maps dealer offered an "unrecorded variants of the first edition for \$44,000 twelve years ago. A map dealer in New York offers a single map from the 1597 edition at \$9500 while offering two listings of the complete 1598 second edition at \$90,000 and \$140,000 respective. It's not clear what the monetary value of our copy would be but something in the range of one-quarter million dollars seems reasonable. But as a resource to scholars and a point of pride on campus: priceless.

What a delightful surprise and a wonderful example of the strength and depth of the collections at Morris Library. As I said, to our knowledge, we are one of only three libraries in the world that own a first edition, first issue. I confess that one of the things I like most about this story is that this book is also owned by the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign – they own the first edition, second issue...

I have one other surprise to share. It does not have the money value of the 1597 atlas but it was, nonetheless, a wonderful affirmation for me of the work we have done at Morris Library over the last few years in building this wonderful new facility. I am a member of the SIU Alumni association and, as such, I receive a copy of their Southern Alumni magazine in the mail. A couple of months ago, I was flipping through the then-new June, 2011, issue, and I came upon a letter published in the magazine from a Charles Naven. Mr. Naven is a 1972 graduate of SIU and currently lives in Naperville, just outside Chicago. Mr. Naven wrote:

It had been twelve years since I had been back to SIU and decided it was time to change that. My wife and I were driving to Memphis this spring and detoured off Interstate 57 to drive through campus and see improvements we have been reading about in the alumni magazine.

Always a beautiful setting we were stunned to see the new Saluki Stadium, Troutt-Whittman Center, some of the new student housing options and the attractive new entrances to campus. But we saved the best for last when we walked through Thompson Woods and arrived at the new Morris Library!

What a showplace that facility now is! Something that can be enjoyed for generations of students to come.

What a pleasure it was for me to read this spontaneous expression of appreciation and delight from an alum. I did not know about this letter and my first reading of it was at home going through the magazine like thousands of other alumni members. My delight in finding the letter was matched by the letter itself and how in reading his letter we discover Morris Library in the same way that Mr. Naven apparently discovered it in his tour of campus. The Saluki stadium – very nice; the Troutt-Whittman Center – yes; new student housing options; very good. But – and I quote Mr. Naven– “we saved the best for last when we walked through Thompson Woods and arrived at the new Morris Library.”

I did not meet Mr. Naven or his wife on their trip to Carbondale and their discovery of Morris Library but I certainly would have liked to. His letter is a wonderful affirmation of the place that is Morris Library. Mr. Naven’s letter was, for me, one of delightful surprises of the year.

One of the things I have always loved about libraries is that they are an unending sources of delight and surprise. In sharing these two brief stories of discovery, I hope I have given you some sense of the extraordinary richness of our collections and the joy of our facilities. As our planning efforts have shown, we have challenges that we need to address but with the strengths we have in our talented staff, in our rich collections, our inspiring facilities, and in our delightful surprises, I know that we will meet the challenges ahead. Thank you for your attention.