Testimony of Carol Mandel  
Dean of Libraries  
New York University  
Before the New York City Planning Commission  
For the Public Hearing on The New York University Core Project

Good Afternoon Chair Burden and Fellow Planning Commissioners,

NYU’s Bobst Library on Washington Square is the main library of the university. In an age of online access you might expect fewer students to use libraries, but one visit to Bobst Library will demonstrate that this not the case. I am here to tell you that the use of library and study space at NYU is greatly expanding, and our students need more.

Bobst Library is a comprehensive research and undergraduate library. It contains over three million print volumes along with a wealth of material in other forms. The library’s special unique collections are open to all researchers who need them. But general use of Bobst is mainly restricted to NYU students and faculty because of the extreme pressure on Library space.

During the school year, Bobst is intensely used by NYU students not only for its collections but for its well-designed study spaces. Study and research are at the heart of the learning process, and space for intellectual productivity is an essential component of a university education.

Here are some statistics indicative of this student study activity:

- We see more than 10,000 visits to the library every day during the academic year. We had more than 2.7 million visits last year.
- We have a limited number of oversubscribed group study rooms; students reserved these rooms over 37,000 times last year—that’s 37,000 study groups busily at work.

You can see the need for proximity to the library for our many users. But, the demands for good space far exceed our ability to provide it.

A standard rule of thumb for a university is that it should provide study area “seats” for one quarter of its student population. At NYU, this would mean we should have over 9,600 seats, yet the Library provides fewer than 3,000. And during the school year, our 2,900 seats are typically at 81% capacity; during exams periods students occupy floor space wherever they can find it. Student comments on our user surveys indicate that their biggest frustration is the inability to find a space to study in Bobst.

We continually seek ways to increase reader capacity. We have moved over 1.3 million volumes to offsite storage, and we reorganize space through renovation to add seating. In 2006, we added 438 seats; we will add another 200 seats through renovation this summer. But the more we renovate, the more our demand increases. Our daily door count has increased by almost 40% since 2006, and our occupancy rate is up 66% -- more students are coming and they stay longer.

The University must add library-like seating, dispersed across the University spaces, and particularly in the Core. The superblocks provide a critical pathway to accommodating these vital spaces.