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Moving a Library Collection to New Quarters: Lessons Learned

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This paper collects the strategies and tasks that the Appalachian State University Library undertook in preparation for the move of its physical collection to a new building from the old library. The paper discusses planning, supervision, winning campus support from stakeholders, and being mindful about the space in the new building and how it would be used well into the 21st century.

Introduction

In November 2000, the citizens of North Carolina approved a \$3.1 billion higher education bond referendum which included \$47.6 million for a new library and parking garage complex at Appalachian State University. In 2001, Pease Associates of Charlotte was chosen as the architect in association with Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson, and Abbott, a Boston firm with experience designing more than 100 libraries throughout the U.S. Though for some libraries obtaining the funding for a new library building is an unimaginable hurdle, this step signaled only the beginning of a long process of planning, preparing, and moving into new quarters. Construction of the new library began in the spring of 2003, with the library opening on-time in June 2005.

The completed new library and information commons is one and a half times as large as the old building, which had been built in 1968, and expanded in 1978. Collaborative learning underlines the entire design of the new building: the new facility has 30 group study rooms versus three in the old library and many of the more than 250 computer workstations throughout the library are designed to accommodate two or more individuals working together.

Giving well-thought and timely input to the architects was crucial to having a result that was livable and designed with library users in mind. The library formed an Internal Building Group with one member from each team in the library and lead by the associate university librarian at the time, Larry Boyer. This group met productively for many long hours over the years of planning, designing, and building. There was also student involvement throughout the process as

well as frequent updates and feedback sessions with faculty groups, student government, deans' council, council of chairs, and our library advisory groups.

One of the most crucial and daunting aspects of occupying a new library is the move of the physical collection. Being prescient enough to anticipate the many challenges and details of a large move is difficult.

Preparing the Collection for the Move

Movers

The only realistic option is to hire professional movers who specialize in large library moves. Be very careful to specify experience and positive references in the bid document. Hiring movers may be under the control of the new building's general contractor as ours was and this requires working with your institution's design and planning office to specify how, with your best interests in mind, the general contractor will seek bids for the move. Our experience bore out that moving a library is a very complex operation requiring previous experience, dedicated equipment, and a trained staff. References to whom we spoke argued convincingly against using local physical plant or general transfer moving companies. References offered cautioned about library moving companies that send only a few supervisors to the site and then hire workers from the local labor pool. Our mover brought veteran supervisors, their crews, and specialized equipment to Boone. The supervisors visited the site twice in advance of the move to advise us about the move, see the access to the two loading docks, and survey the new building's shelving. During the move, they worked 12 hour days, 6.5 days per week. Any additional costs to us were easily balanced by the quality of the work and the very few collection arrangement problems we encountered later. Moving our collection required almost one month. To help bond all those working on the project, we included the moving crew in all our celebratory events during the move.

Weeding

Our collection includes approximately 850,000 bound volumes, plus microforms, maps, realia, kits, an extensive childrens' book collection, and an 8' stuffed brown bear and a stuffed Canada goose belonging to our various special collections. Our annual accessions range from 15,000 – 20,000 volumes. Our assignable square feet (ASF) ¹ from the old to the new building increased 50% from 90,000 ASF to 150,000 ASF. With growth space somewhat limited in the new building, one of the major issues leading up to the move involved anticipating what we truly needed to preserve or retain, what we could de-commission or weed from the collection, and how the materials in the new building would be housed.

Weeding was a priority project, beginning almost two years before the move. There were several areas which we targeted specifically for weeding:

Government Documents

During the 1970s, like many academic libraries, we broadened our government documents profile in order to easily increase our collection size and provide healthy accession statistics to university administrators and others. This area with little used pamphlets, posters, booklets, brochures, and out-dated reports immediately came to mind as a target for weeding.

We began by reducing our SuDoc item profile for government documents. At the same time, a librarian highly experienced with our campus and with government documents began pulling things from the stacks for weeding. Library staff from the Serials team took the lead to go through government document periodicals whose print runs ended years ago and weeded those, especially those publications which were now online. Serials took this lead because of their expertise and remarkable patience searching for title changes and title splits.

Reference Collection

Like many libraries, we are witnessing a sharp decline in the patron and librarian use of print materials in the Reference Collection. Our reference section in the new building was built with half-sized (counter height) shelves to accommodate reading within the stacks (propping a book on top of the shelves) and to accommodate an important design feature that allows those entering the building to see immediately the vista of the entire floor back to a large two-story windows. The smaller space allocated for the reference collection, therefore, aligned both with the direction indicated by both the declining use of print reference books and the aesthetics of the new building.

In a library with separate Reference and Collection Development teams, the two worked together to identify and relocate reference materials more appropriate for the general stacks and to weed unused, dated, and irrelevant titles entirely. During this pre-move process and on a book-by-book basis, we could change the opac location code and move the book immediately to the old building's stacks after the decision to relocate. Large sets that could not be transferred within the old building presented the challenge of moving and properly interfiling the sets into the general collection on-the-fly during the actual days of moving. Good planning and obvious flagging in the collection aided this work. At the time of the move, with these large sets of materials, we worked carefully alongside the movers to inter-shelve these into the main stacks at the correct call number location. Many materials moved out of Reference and into the main stacks retained their non-circulating status, while other titles became circulating. In retrospect, many staff members think assigning main stacks books a non-circulating status is confusing and unnecessary. This illustrates how the library staff's vision changed as the process advanced. Some of those course corrections were made easily and others could not be.

It is interesting to note that even though we decreased the reference print collection by approximately 50%, it is the observation of some reference librarians that it is still too big. The image of a reference librarian going into the reference stacks or ready reference to pull a volume has been replaced with the librarian showing a patron how to search a reference database or web resource. Are reference stack print sources on the verge of obsolescence?

Main Stacks

Though we were moving into a building with growth space for 10-15 years and new shelf occupancy at 60% full, we saw the move as an opportunity to coordinate a push for the librarians to weed their sections of the general collections, a task that frequently falls to the bottom of a to-do list. Anything we weeded pre-move would allow us more growth space and save us from moving items that would eventually be tossed. In addition, it ensured an opening-day collection that was attractive and full of useful materials.

We took two tactics: weeding obvious multiple copies and then going through for materials that are no longer appropriate to our needs. The first task is easier; through running reports in the opac report writer or simply walking through the stacks, one can identify, for example, where we bought as many as 14 copies of a 1970s lab manual for a professor to keep on reserve. Scanning for content appropriateness is more difficult. Typically, bibliographers would work with a student who would bring them a full book cart of everything in a section (leaving a flag on the empty shelves about how to page a book) and then the bibliographer would work through that cart in their office — rather than having to go to the stacks with a laptop or another arrangement. This system *pushed* the books to the librarian and helped us move more quickly through large sections. The inconvenience of a large three-shelf, double-sided book truck in the librarian's office aided turn-around times.

For this type of task, we found it best if we assigned ranges to each librarian, rather than asking them to work through their subject areas (which can overlap and yet still leave gaps). When the focus is on subject specialties, some sections inevitably receive more attention than others.

Journals

The journals, magazines, and most serials at the Appalachian State University Library are kept in a separate section and shelved alphabetically. When we moved, there was discussion whether to:

1. Classify and merge the journals into the main stacks, allowing browsing across and within subject specialties;
2. Continue a separate serials collection, but assign call numbers and re-order the volumes; or
3. Continue a separate serials collection using the same alphabetical arrangement.

We decided on the latter, easier course, despite it making some work more difficult. Typically users are seeking a specific title, volume, and issue number, and alphabetical arrangement works well enough, excepting title changes. But this arrangement can make browsing impossible. For example, an assignment where students are assigned to look through different poetry journals would be challenging. Significant costs were also involved with assigning call numbers to and marking more than one hundred thousand periodical volumes. Additionally, the campus had a decades-long familiarity with the existing arrangement.

Following current trends in academic libraries, our print journals are used less and less often. The Internal Building Group decided to employ compact shelving for the print serials collection. This decision, made in 2001, was driven by an increasing emphasis at the time on electronic journals. We could not see into the future well-enough to know if everything would be

electronic in 2005, when the building opened. As we discovered, everything was not electronic, but direction towards electronic remained clear. Compact shelving allowed us to save critical ASF with the trade-off being the high costs for the compact shelving and necessary building upfits to accommodate the weight of the filled compact shelving. The floors on two floors currently in conventional shelving were also built to carry the load of future compact shelving if needed.

Where titles and items were weeded from serials, these largely consisted of dead runs or very short runs where we had a small and insignificant portion of a title. We weeded some government document serials (such as Department of Defense unit newsletters now found online). Our participation in a robust three-library consortium (Western North Carolina Library Network, WNCLN) allowed us to work over a series of weeks with the other two libraries to identify JSTOR titles held in print by all three libraries where we could discard all but one of the libraries' runs. By UNC-Asheville or Western Carolina University (our consortial partners) agreeing to act as the designated holding library for their run of a journal held in its entirety in JSTOR, we were able to hold fast to our goal of maintaining access to an archival copy while freeing up space. The serials librarians at the three schools noted a field in the cataloging record of serials naming which university's library would be the designated holding library for that title. This recorded our decisions for future librarians in WNCLN.

Undertaking a large weeding initiative at the same time as moving into a much larger building may seem counter-intuitive and perhaps even politically dangerous. What if the faculty on campus were troubled by their misperception of our haphazardly discarding materials? To keep this in check, we tried to remain conservative in our weeding, and typically did not weed materials which might potentially enjoy future use. However, our main goal was to open the new building with an inviting collection: one that would prompt greater browsing and use of the print materials and push the message that the library's print collections are relevant to 21st century researchers.

Problems with Shelves

Though not intuitive to most, libraries do need to buy all new shelving when they make a major move. Otherwise, it proves to be an almost insurmountable time- and labor-intensive effort to remove the books, keep them in order, disassemble the shelving, move the shelving and install it properly and safely in the new building, and then return the books to the new shelves in the correct order. The added expense of new shelving may be competitive in price to the expense of hiring professional library and shelving contractor movers for longer periods of time and keeping both libraries off-limits to patrons while you try to take apart and rebuild the shelving.

For stationary shelving, the Internal Building Group made good choices with selecting a bottom shelf with an inclined surface of fifteen degrees, so that users can view the items on the bottom shelf without bending down. Other shelving choices were problematic. The book ends we selected are a "W" shape that snap unexpectedly out of their tracks. If motorized (rather than manual) compact shelving is installed, we recommend investing in one of the highest level of safety features. Without the maximum number of detectors, the compact shelving can be intimidating and move in ways unexpected by the novice patron. Safety is particularly important

if the motorized shelves are in public areas. For the price point driven library, manual compact shelving may be a better choice.

Other shelving issues may be more difficult to foresee. For example, we selected high-density sliding storage for our VHS and DVD format materials. In cabinets that pull out from their tracks, the films are now stored in an organized way, but their browsability is significantly diminished by the high-density compactness limiting multi-patron use in the small space. Display shelving may have been a better, though more space consuming option.

Presentations from a number of shelving and other equipment vendors educated us about shelving and made us better consumers and bid writers. Detailed discussion about shelving, how it relates to building lighting, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act can be found in a number of books on library planning and construction. Begin with Keyes Metcalf's, *Planning academic and research library buildings* (ALA, 1986). It is the classic volume. Then go on to newer works which supplement this work's foundation.

Moving Day: Moving the Collection

The first impression of many staff was that during the physical move, everyone would be able to take or be forced to take vacation leave: we would have professional book movers, our offices would be packed up... How could we possibly be of use during the move? In actuality, every person in the library was needed throughout the move in several different ways. Our main work groups included Security Detail, Computer Assistants (who helped disconnect and reconnect office and public terminals), Reference Outpost Librarians (who worked in the Student Union at a temporary reference satellite desk), and Shelf Readers. The Shelf Readers were assigned to work alongside the professional book movers. There were Shelf Reader teams located simultaneously in the old library and in the new library working with the moving crews. All the groups were in contact via several sets of walkie-talkies (the buildings are only a few hundred yards apart). As problems arose on one end, the team on the other end could be notified or consulted. For the librarians assigned as Shelf Readers, our main purpose was to help troubleshoot and solve problems that arose and to monitor book re-shelving accuracy (aka shelf-reading).

We found it beneficial to have subject specialists, when possible, working with the book movers on this assignment. When questions arose about the inter-filing of those large reference sets into the main stacks, for example, we were able to place them properly. In one section, where we were extremely short on space, we were able to identify a large set of materials (the *National Union Catalog*) that was moved to an alternate location.

Overall, it was valuable for the subject specialists to be shelf reading the collection because we were able to identify some items that had clearly been missed in weeding such as having multiple copies of a 30-year old textbook and identify gaps in our collection efforts. One of the primary findings of this effort was how aged and worn our literary fiction has become. Spending such

large amounts of time in the stacks helped us come to the conclusion that additional funds needed to be raised or allocated for the replacement of many of these canonical works of literature.

Publicizing the Move: Getting Buy-In for the Project

Internally, the library move needed buy-in from the employees themselves. With the need to defer vacations and work evenings and weekends to accommodate the moving contractors' schedules, we needed to keep a strong morale and make sure everyone was rewarded for their extra effort. The library administration worked to create a fun and egalitarian atmosphere for staff through weekly lunches and breakfasts for everyone including the movers and contracted workers. Library administrators worked hard alongside the staff and carried their weight with the sometimes onerous tasks. The library provided all staff member with two polo shirts with the library logo. This allowed the staff to be easily identified for security purposes at building entrances, kept staff from dirtying personal clothing, added some group cohesiveness, and helped to identify staff for the movers and contractors needing direction. Encouraging emails and thoughtful and thankful communications throughout the process helped the staff stay engaged and positive about the upheaval.

For the campus, garnering support was crucial. From the beginning planning stages, library administrators worked to communicate important information about the move and to gather feedback. One highlight of our communication efforts dealing with the book collection move was the Ceremonial Book Chain. For this event, a group of library staff worked together to invite the campus to an event focused around a bucket brigade style book-chain from the old to the new library. Subject specialists selected 100 items to represent the collection. In our selections, we tried to cover all the disciplinary areas of our campus as well as a range of media and a selection of items highlighting our unique materials. Through invitations to campus leaders and a large promotional push, the event was well-attended and a playful way to bring the campus to thinking about the challenges of a large library move.

No amount of p.r. work can alleviate all of the frustrations faculty and students may have when they are unable to access materials during the move. Some faculty had trouble grasping the scale of the work to move a library and felt closing for more than a month was excessive, even though the move was timed to occur during an intersession between spring and summer terms. These concerns had to be addressed through meetings and personal communications. We needed to get all the books back in the building before the move and under advisement from the movers, we set due-dates a week before the move began so all the collection would be on the shelf, and we could accurately gauge the shelf space needed throughout the collection. During the move we did not offer a paging service for materials, though we did keep our online resources available and established the Reference outpost in the Student Union. However, on a case-by-case basis, we did attempt to solve problems in advance with a user-centered attitude. As an example, a few professors taught Art courses during the intersession in which the library would be closed. On their request, we put together a Reserves shelf of materials in our one branch library, the Music Library, which remained open throughout the move.

Space: Finding Materials, Promoting Materials

It is impossible to anticipate all the variables involved in a major move, so buffering for those course corrections is crucial. Money mistakes and space mistakes particularly come to light in the later stages of a move. However, overestimating what a project will cost and how much space is needed can help planning efforts yield better-thought-out results.

One of our major problems was the lack of signage on opening day. Quickly, reference staff rushed to put together a sketch of the floor plans of the building and directional flyers. Circulation staff posted some basic directional signage on the floors. However, it is now a year from the opening day, and signage continues to be an area where our oversight early on is still felt. Incorporating the feedback and assistance of a consultant who studies human movement patterns and recognition would have garnered useful recommendations for us and the patrons.

Even though we worked to have an intuitive, easy-to-understand stack arrangement, we find that most visitors still need a tutorial to find basic items. Through working with the architect — notably a library architect — from the beginning, libraries may begin to anticipate how a freshman will walk into a building and begin the search for materials. For example, should materials be separated by format — so that one can go to the audio books section and browse? Or should the audio book be located beside its print version in the stacks? If these decisions are based on user patterns rather than expediency, a move can be an opportunity to improve the library for generations. On the other hand, though we tried to be mindful of ergonomics and spatial relations, our layout is still not entirely straightforward for patrons, and perhaps no very large library arrangement can be. With five floors of materials, perhaps only directional signs and friendly staff can help ease the experience of walking into a vast new library space.

Because our library materials are spread out through the five floors, it is important to consider what library materials will be pushed to visitors by virtue of their location in prominent places. On the first level is a beautiful stone gas fireplace with shelving nearby for a McNaughton plan general reading (browsing) collection and for the New Book Shelves. The only other print collection on this entrance-level floor is the reference print collection, located in proximity to the large Reference desk. Otherwise, the floor is dedicated to an information commons environment with public computer terminals and scanners stationed on custom tables designed for more than one person to work at each station, facilitating collaborative work. The floor also has a somewhat classic library reading room with tables and lounge seating, as well as with five of our group study rooms. The redefinition and reduction of the Reference collection allowed this floor to open for these functions.

This arrangement of high profile items means that we are pushing towards the entering patron the reading, new materials, digital work, collaborative work, and information skills development in our most high profile space. Now as a patron walks into the new library there is a new and different sense of our priorities as the campus information provider. Some libraries have used their high profile areas to promote other materials, such as using a browsing section for independent and small-press publishers; a periodicals reading room with popular or interesting journals and magazines; or having a large set of display cases for exhibits. Since this area is the one most seen by visitors and donors, it is important to contemplate how it will be used.

Conclusion: The Result of Hard Work

As other libraries have experienced, the hard work of planning and building a new space has paid off in a surge in use of all library materials and space. Not surprisingly, in the year after the move, there were 50,000 additional circulation transactions and the gate count was up 160% when compared to the gate count from the pre-move year (from 420,626 in 2004-2005 to 661,232 in 2005-2006). Perhaps more surprisingly, other library areas also experienced a sharp increase, even when related only tangentially to the new building. Library instruction sessions (information literacy classes) went from 372 in the pre-move year to 532 in the first year after the move, reaching 3,500 additional individuals. Electronic database searches almost doubled (from 533,859 to 925,422) and searches of the library catalog *from outside the library building* more than doubled (from 204,726 to 559,627).

A new library building can be a spark for learning, research, collaboration, and creativity on campus. By learning about the experiences and mistakes of others, those librarians and staff managing and living through a big move can be rejuvenated too by the experience.

¹ *The assignable square feet (ASF) is the amount of space between wall surfaces that is usable for library programs. ASF does not include corridors, restrooms, janitors or maintenance areas, and other physical plant support spaces. Walls and columns are not included in ASF. The new library's gross square feet measurement is approximately 215,00 GSF.*