
Charleston Voices: Perspectives from the 2017 Conference

Lars Meyer

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The Future of Print in Open Stacks

Lorrie McAllister,

Associate University Librarian for Collections & Strategy, Arizona State University, lorrie.mcallister@asu.edu

Shari Laster

Head, Open Stack Collections, Arizona State University, shari.laster@asu.edu

ABSTRACT

Arizona State University is embracing new ways of thinking about how open stacks can make books active objects of engagement for a new generation of students, rather than risk becoming mere backdrops for study spaces. By taking a deliberate design approach to answering the question of “which books, where?,” ASU Library seeks to position print collections as an engagement mechanism. This chapter presents the transformative potential of open stacks, along with planning for access, assessment, and inclusive engagement. The authors describe how ASU Library is using a major library renovation project as a catalyst to explore these ideas, and propose a pathway to developing shared solutions for more effective use of library collections.

Introduction

At the 2017 Charleston Conference, Jim O'Donnell, university librarian at Arizona State University (ASU), set forward "The Future of Print in Open Stacks: A Proposal," envisioning a bright future for the use of printed books in libraries. He argued that print books have become pleasant furnishings and backdrops for quiet study within the open stacks of academic libraries and declared that a glorious future for print books demands strategy. [2] [N2_1] At ASU, we are embracing new ways of thinking about how our open stacks can make books active objects of engagement for a new generation of students, rather than risk becoming mere backdrops for study spaces. The tradition of direct access to printed books in libraries is foundational to invigorating user engagement with print. Therefore, we aim to position the open stacks as engagement mechanism, taking a deliberate design approach to *which* books we place *where* so that users may interact with them.

O'Donnell, along with Lorrie McAllister, associate university librarian at ASU, introduced a collaboratively authored whitepaper, "The Future of the Academic Library Print Collection: A Space for Engagement," [N2_2] [N2_2] which was written with input from faculty members and information professionals from several academic research institutions to inspire academic libraries to rethink print collections as vital tools for inquiry and engagement. The white paper, made possible by support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, outlines many issues and challenges facing academic libraries regarding print collections. In this chapter, we highlight a few in particular that we feel are worthy of expansion and further study with regard to O'Donnell's Charleston proposal. We also provide an update regarding how ASU plans to employ these new ideas to address our local context.

The New Open Stacks

At ASU Library, we believe that our open stacks are not just mechanisms for collection storage, but also have the potential to transform scholarship, education, and our communities by engaging people with information. This approach necessitates examining the relationship of academic libraries to

our users, looking at ways to change the traditional power dynamics of institutional collecting to develop a more democratic and inclusive approach. Government entities, to achieve more democratic solutions, often use engagement as a methodology to involve citizens in the processes of governance. In this sense, engagement is essentially a form of participation, and consultation, or the ascertaining of opinions, lies at the heart of all forms of engagement (Stewart 2009, 9). The American Library Association has acknowledged equity, diversity, and inclusion as fundamental values for library practice. [3]_[#N2_3]_By innovating, assessing, and innovating again toward more inclusive practices, academic libraries may be able to incorporate participatory processes that aim to promote shared governance and greater community engagement, which should in turn inform the ongoing curation of academic library collections.

The 2017 white paper identified five primary goals for shaping the future of print collections:

First ... we must take a deliberate and consciously chosen approach to print collection management. Second, we are committed to the fostering of information literacy broadly speaking and print literacy specifically. Third, we seek new curation approaches to ensure that our libraries reflect the full range and nuance of global cultures, past and present. Fourth, we propose strategies (and ways of devising further strategies) to allow academic libraries to work at a network level, accommodating a larger population of students and scholars than in the past... . Finally, we look to extend the reach of academic libraries to engage with the communities surrounding them as a way of realizing the commitments to inclusiveness that animate our institutions today. (Arizona State University Library 2017, 7)

The word *curation* is raised in the whitepaper and in this writing to call attention to print lifecycle management as an active endeavor, in all of its various meanings. Johnson articulates the challenges of using the word

curation, which is used in different ways by different audiences. She describes three ways to interpret curation: as the act of selection and acquiring, as exhibition-making, and as the act of sustaining a collection (Johnson 2014). We view curation of the new open stacks as an opportunity to design print with screen engagement and online discovery in mind. The Digital Curation Centre defines digital curation as active management for “maintaining, preserving and adding value to digital research data throughout its lifecycle.” [4]_[#N2_4]_ We use the term *curation* to describe a planned, iterative series of interventions to define, create, refine, and present a grouping of materials for a specified purpose. Using a digital collections framework for print resources asks that we actively manage our stacks, rather than allowing them to simply accrete through various disconnected selection mechanisms until a particular range is full, then weed or deaccession books when space runs out.

ASU Library is using participatory methodologies to move our print curation away from hierarchical institutional decision making toward a more user-engaged, democratic, and inclusive approach to designing the stacks. This approach is in alignment with the library’s overall strategic direction. As McAllister has previously articulated, “In taking community needs into account, we can demonstrate the relevance of the library to its communities while serving the greater public good and fostering a positive relationship between academia and the public at large. This approach suits ASU’s interest in assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural, and overall health of the communities it serves” (McAllister and Adams 2018, 33). The ASU Charter directs us to measure our efforts in terms of inclusiveness and success, to advance research for the common good, and to responsibly serve the economic, social, cultural, and overall health of our communities. [5]_[#N2_5]_ For the library, the charter is a clear directive to examine how everything we do models these principles. By articulating the design of our collections as a service to advance engagement, learning, knowledge creation, and the common good, we place collections in the same universe of possibility as our other initiatives and programs.

In his plenary talk, O'Donnell stated: "We're inventing a new generation of service." He suggests that using a fresh and thoughtful approach to building print collections will change academic library services as we know them today. Information is powerful and transformational only if it is accessible, and in order to make our over four million print books accessible alongside millions of online resources, we have some challenges to overcome in our discovery and fulfillment services. Likewise, we aim to transform our open stacks into browsable collections in which to discover and interact with previously undiscovered sources of information. O'Donnell articulates that the overarching goal of our efforts is to "invent new ways to make the print book in the modern research library exciting and visible and engaging for our students." We believe this necessitates new methodologies for collection development and placement of books in libraries. Thus, we propose a revision to the traditional notion of "open stacks."

At ASU Library, the Open Stack Collections unit has responsibility for general collections, including reference works and government documents, both those shelved in open stacks and those held at our high-density storage facility, and openly licensed digital collections, including open educational resources (OER) and government information. The open stacks as a service concept invoke the spirit of academic libraries as upholding the principles of open access to knowledge and inspiration for the campus and communities they serve (McAllister and Laster 2018, 424). Of course, all who enter our buildings are welcomed to access books on shelves. However, with the Open Education movement reaching its 18th year, we hope to use our open stack efforts as an opportunity and means to engage people and, ultimately, to promote inquiry and improve education. To accomplish this, we are taking a purposeful, participatory, and strategic approach to decision making about the selection of print books and the disposition of them to open shelving in a library or to off-site storage facilities.

Major renovations of academic library buildings often result in the movement of collections off site, and the subsequent reduction of print books in those buildings in favor of expanded spaces for library users. ASU is no exception. Hayden Library, a 252,670-square-foot library located at the center of ASU's Tempe campus, serves over 50,000 students enrolled in

residential programs. A comprehensive renovation project provides the motivation for exploring how we can transform the collections in this space. At the Hayden Library groundbreaking, O'Donnell remarked that "libraries are books, and much, much more beside. Libraries are central to the educational enterprise, the critical link connecting students to the university and to the world of knowledge." [6].[#N2_6].As we reduce our print collections footprint in the new space to expand classroom and study space, we are taking advantage of the opportunity to think flexibly and to design the 21st-century library so that space and collections have a harmonious relationship that is adaptable to changes in the local context, as activities, interests, expectations, and skills of the people who use our libraries shift over time. As part of our design agenda, we are also seizing this opportunity to transform the accessibility of our spaces and collections. This includes the physical accessibility of our building, furniture, and collections, as well as a focus on making information services easier to access and more transparent.

In higher education, access to print books is often taken for granted, along with the requisite skills for engaging with content in these works. While engagement with print is often overlooked in the pressing need to improve information skills for digital environments and contexts, there are reasons to use print books. Learning how to navigate content in a physical book and identify visual cues evident from inspecting an object are helpful strategies for working with this format. The characteristics of the physical form of a print object may themselves be of interest and value, including its weight, form, and structure, and interacting with a physical format can hold a reader's attention in different ways.

Collections may also be used as pedagogical tools and sites of critical discourse. They prompt questions like: Who collects and why? What's missing? How does format of the information resource matter? By surfacing the opportunity to open these questions for discussion and conversation, the academic library serves as educator, encouraging learners to adopt a critical lens to ways in which content can be aggregated and presented. In adopting a deliberate design methodology for our print collections, we hope to produce stronger and more engaging collections that will promote more

effective use of the library, while extending the ways in which we fulfill our pedagogical mission.

Access and Assessment

When planning for access, enabling discovery and request fulfillment for materials is key. Libraries have used open stacks to provide opportunities for discovery for many years. With the proliferation of digital content, the use of discovery layer search interfaces has taken the place of browsing at the stacks. Off-site, high-density storage facilities may be ideal locations for books, as they are climate-controlled secure environments that will ensure these materials are preserved over the long term. They also have reliable access mechanisms that allow staff to pinpoint item locations, allowing for quick retrieval of print resources. These facilities, then, serve as fulfillment centers for collections, serving to connect people with the books they request. They are optimized for access. However, the books in off-site storage are undiscoverable without online library interfaces (Schechtman 2018). While commercial library discovery tools seek to replicate the experience of searching for digital content, they have yet to succeed in placing digital and tangible formats on equal footing, and in some ways have not substantially progressed beyond online public access catalog functions developed decades ago (Lynema, Lown, and Woodbury 2012).

Assessment of collections often focuses on usage, with circulation as the primary, and sometimes exclusive, data point for determining the extent to which current collections meet user needs (Kniewel, Wicht, and Connaway 2006, 36). We posit that this approach can disadvantage many users within our walls, who may not find that the books most directly in front of them inspire interest. The question again becomes, what books do we have, and where do we put them? Our data on collection usage must be understood in light of how collections are situated in the environment in which users encounter them. A collection identified for active engagement, curated with community input, and featured within a well-designed space, may inspire different uses from a collection developed for core disciplinary exploration and research, or a collection findable through the library discovery interface and delivered from a high-density storage facility.

In developing a data-driven approach to print curation, which includes active and iterative identification and creation of engaging collections, our project also seeks to identify ways in which engagement with users provides us with data to direct future decisions. As we move beyond circulation and interlibrary loans to a more rich data environment, we can explore new ways to articulate how our communities may prefer to engage with different works, formats, and collections. At the same time we are challenged to move beyond overly reducible modes of assessment. As we assert that engagement extends beyond a single category of quantifiable transactions, we must also critically and openly reflect on the ways in which data arising from engagement enhance or inhibit a nuanced understanding of the people with whom we seek to collaborate, and adapt our actions as necessary. What we gain from this type of reframing is the creation of a heightened awareness of library practices as enacted, embodied, or realized—this is praxis in print collection management (Doherty 2005).

Inclusive Engagement

Building many of the practices explored here and in the white paper asks that we reexamine decision making about our print collections. Exploring how libraries make decisions about selection, format, arrangement, description, and retention is a first step. Working with external partners and community members will help libraries identify points in workflows in which biases influence decision makers. The Digital Library Federation's Cultural Assessment Working Group is engaged with this exploration, most recently with regard to the selection of digital content (Scates Kettler et al. 2017). We think this work has promising extensions to print collections.

As we focus on creating collections that welcome people into library spaces, we seek effective ways to involve them in processes essential to the design, selection, and display of these collections. To develop welcoming and engaging collections for all who enter our spaces, we need to rely on the knowledge and experience of a more broadly representative constituency. For our collections to become more inclusive, they must reflect the voices, perspectives, and interests of those who have been underrepresented or excluded from dominant modes of scholarly communication.

Academic library collection development policies and practices frequently result in the selection of materials that are largely congruent with existing collections. These collections can risk perpetuating dominant practices in many scholarly communities, which privilege the status quo in scope and scale of work, modes of expression, and accepted methodologies. In general, the prioritization of markers of authority still remains part of traditional library collection practices (Seeber 2018). While upending practices like these is a critical project for all libraries to engage with, we also believe that it is essential to undertake deliberate and careful consideration of how best to do so. In the intervening time we seek to transition to a model in which the materials we center for discovery and exploration both explicitly and implicitly acknowledge deficits in existing collections, as we explore how we might remediate some of the most pressing and visible inequities in our collections going forward.

In designing collections for inclusion, we also acknowledge that many ways of learning and understanding are not accounted for in how libraries organize and present materials (Olson 2011, 118). Barriers to entry include systems of classification and organization that impose meaning, expectations for access and use that demand conformance with implicit gatekeeping, and arrangement in space that places specific physical requirements on those who wish to browse and explore (Rosen 2017). We seek to address these barriers by first identifying and acknowledging them, and then working to develop mitigation strategies. Community-sourced descriptions and arrangements, virtual stacks browsing tools, and placement of library collections outside library walls are all strategies we plan to test in the months to come.

Local Context as Testbed

With generous support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ASU Library is now actively developing approaches to engaging our communities with print resources based on the vision and strategies set forward in the white paper. As of this writing, Hayden Library, the largest library on the Tempe campus of ASU, is in the midst of a two-year renovation project. With the building empty, we have seized the opportunity to explore a zero-

based budgeting approach to planning collections. We intend to select collections by determining and prioritizing what books should be situated within the library's space, rather than simply returning the books that fit from the collections previously held within the building. Throughout 2018 and 2019, staff will be working on experimental projects that set forth various engagement-oriented approaches to defining, selecting, arranging, presenting, delivering, and assessing collections. These projects extend our capacity to responsively design and produce active collections, and will inform our work on the much larger project of designing open stack collections for Hayden Library's reopening.

When Hayden Library fully reopens in 2020, we expect this space will invite learners and scholars to study, work, and interact with each other, and with our collections, services, and expertise. Our renovated Hayden Library will offer various types of space, seating, and resources intermingled as a user-centered cohesive whole, with collections designed for people to explore and use. Along with art and exhibit spaces, collections featured here will reflect intentional design of space for the needs of ASU's growing communities of learners, scholars, and visitors. Whether accessing course reserve materials, seeking and discovering information related to personal and intellectual interests, or simply passing through on the way to another destination, those who enter Hayden Library will encounter library collections in ways that we hope will engage, inspire, and welcome them.

The main floor will situate distinctive collections, including rare books and archives, alongside browsable shelves featuring materials held by these collections, in close proximity to the reading room spaces and services. The concourse will feature smaller-scale bookshelves with active, "louder" print books and digital displays highlighting complementary resources, alongside classrooms visited by masses of students each day. And the fourth floor, where most of the browsable collections will be located, will provide the setting for "quieter" volumes, alongside quiet study spaces. While "quiet," collections designed for the fourth floor will include core disciplinary works contextualized with a range of historical perspectives, major research and reference tools that are best browsed and used in print formats, and actively programmed collections that will be evaluated and redesigned over time.

Putting these design principles into action requires a careful look at the intersections between collections and operations. For example, we will need to purchase additional copies of some books to make available in specially featured, high-traffic locations, and books that are structurally sound and in good condition for general use may nevertheless be candidates for replacement with a crisp new copy. Also, relocating books on a frequent basis will require staff collaboration in developing new practices for making frequent location changes, retrieving and reshelving books in display spaces, and responding to the questions and comments that we hope will inevitably arise as a by-product of these engagement ventures.

The result of rethinking the open stacks at Hayden with a “zero-based budgeting approach” means that we are also considering how more than four million print volumes held across all of our locations contribute to engagement within Hayden Library *and* within each library on each of our campuses throughout the greater Phoenix metro area. Design choices made in support of this project will have resonance throughout our collection as a whole, and will in turn inform future directions for the experience of visitors at each of these sites.

Future Directions

At the end of O’Donnell’s thought-provoking remarks at the 2017 Charleston Conference, he stated, “we also know that we cannot simply do it alone.” O’Donnell is referring to the need for making a major shift in how we think about local print collections in light of their impact on our network of partner collections. Borrowing and lending services as well as shared print archiving programs may be affected. Over many decades, academic libraries have developed consortia as a response to growing financial pressures and changing expectations of space use in their buildings. Libraries have increasingly collaborated on large-scale infrastructure as they move “towards a set of services around creation, curation, and consumption of resources that are less anchored in a locally managed collection and more driven by engagement with research and learning behaviors” (Dempsey 2015, 30). Large borrowing and lending networks allow users access to even the most obscure materials located almost

anywhere in the world. These same networks can also allow libraries the freedom to build local collections that provide highly curated and engaging open stack print collections. Local collections resonate with local communities because users have confidence in the network [7]_[#N2_7]_to obtain all other materials needed by scholars.

Looking forward, we find there is a compelling need within the United States and beyond to pursue more directed conversations toward planning coordinated print collection development practices for the breadth of scholarly communication still published in print format. Shared print archiving networks are reaching maturity for scholarly journals and show promise for other materials such as monographs (Stambaugh and Demas 2016); still there remains a pressing need to reconcile tension between meeting local needs and addressing broad network efforts (Center for Research Libraries 2003).

Practitioners at academic libraries with shared concerns about the future of local print collections, who engage with similar concerns in their own local contexts, are well positioned to develop new strategies and nuances to the approaches that arise from our work here. Reciprocal sharing of successes, failures, and further questions to explore benefits us all: while no two contexts are exactly the same, every difference may nevertheless highlight new possibilities for those who are willing to listen and learn. To that end, we have made public a template for a case study [8]_[#N2_8]_that encourages articulation of local context and the development of a strategic framework for exploring new directions for print collections. We intend to follow with our own case study and encourage others to do the same.

While the overall prospect for collecting and preserving the many products of academic work is just as tenuous as that of preserving the vast majority of digital output that represents our networked social and cultural contexts, we can work together on shared solutions for effective use of our current resources, in light of our shared responsibility to the future. Someday, we may be able to answer O'Donnell's question "*Which books, where?*"—or at

the very least, better understand the implications of this question for all that academic libraries do with print.

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Notes

1. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Go4GJCYCLqk> [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Go4GJCYCLqk>].[♣] [#N2_1-ptri]

2. Available for download at: <https://lib.asu.edu/futureprint> [<https://lib.asu.edu/futureprint>].[♣] [#N2_2-ptri]

