

Designing a Bright Future for Print Collections

by **Lorrie McAllister** (Associate University Librarian for Collections Services & Analysis, Arizona State University) <lorrie.mcallister@asu.edu>

and **John Henry Adams, PhD** (MLS Candidate at Indiana University) <adamsjoh@iu.edu>

At the 2017 Charleston Conference, Jim O'Donnell and Lorrie McAllister from Arizona State University Library (ASU) introduced the whitepaper *The Future of the Academic Library Print Collection: A Space for Engagement*. This document aimed to inspire and serve as a clarion call for academic libraries to rethink their print collections as vital tools for inquiry and engagement.

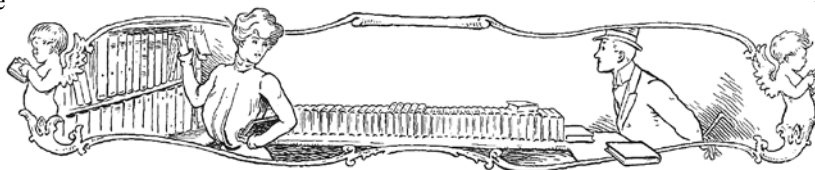
In the whitepaper, the authors lay out many issues and challenges facing academic libraries regarding print collections. In this article, the authors will highlight four issues set forth in the whitepaper, offer additional thoughts for discussion, and provide an update regarding how Arizona State University is planning to employ several ideas from the whitepaper to address its local context, particularly with regard to the relationship of collections to spaces.

One issue raised in the whitepaper is that, historically, academic libraries developed over time to effectively become warehouses for books.¹ The largest academic libraries are often touted as the best libraries, with quality and quantity serving as equivalent measures.² Over the past several years, however, several factors have been working against the "quantity is quality" trend. One is the "digital-first" paradigm, where users believe that they can access and comprehend all of a library's holdings without stepping foot inside a library. Other factors include the rise of e-resources, the proliferation of online educational programs, the reduction of print circulation, and the increasing interest in quantifying library support in service of student success. These and other factors are pushing institutions to shift from using volume counts as indicators of quality to analyzing metrics that indicate patron use of resources (collections, services, and expertise) when demonstrating the value of the library to the institution.³

Because of these forces and the increasing cost of space on academic campuses, space planning in libraries is moving toward a smaller footprint for books and more space for student study and research. As books move away from campuses and into storage, libraries are revisiting traditional notions of browsing and discovery of resources. Library space design has changed dramatically over the past ten years, yet the correlate in the online library (navigation, browsing, discovery, and use) remains relatively unchanged in form and function. Some users also lament the diminishing opportunity to serendipitously browse book stacks in person and are not satisfied with the current state of virtual library use, despite the implementation of commercial discovery layers. While aiming to ease the user's jour-

ney through electronic piles of books, articles, databases, and indexing, discovery layers, for the most part, have not substantially progressed beyond traditional library catalog functions and features developed many decades ago.⁴ Many librarians and educators remain proponents of print resources and believe that there are many advantages to print book technologies. These forces contribute to some academic libraries bringing back print book displays, exhibits, and book stacks that may have a smaller footprint but are intentionally designed and curated for particular spaces, needs, and uses.

When designing the stacks where users will interact with print volumes in person and primarily for the purpose of visual discovery, there is an opportunity for the stacks to become active participants within the space, engaging with the viewer. Purposefully selected items



may be kept close at hand for users in-library, rather than taking a passive approach to what accumulates on library shelves. An example raised in the whitepaper is the moving of materials en masse to off-site high density storage after they have been made available in digital form. While this indeed allows space to be repurposed, it creates collections that may not be based on content that users need or want to review in person. Instead, the decision is based either on the need to save space in a particular building, on preservation interests, or the prioritization of attention to online resources. The opportunity here is to design collections in publicly-accessible library spaces with an eye toward browsing and coherence so the selection principles of the open stacks are readily apparent, even to the first-time viewer.

A second issue raised in the whitepaper is that libraries serve three roles with regard to print and space design. First, they provide open stacks that serve to display and provide immediate access to print materials; second, they manage and preserve a far larger amount of material in closed off-site stacks; and third, they maintain a large borrowing network to obtain everything else that they do not hold or license. Rethinking what academic libraries hold in print on- and off-site, license in electronic format, and access through borrowing networks necessitates a hard look at the financial, physical, and human resources libraries have available to deploy, whom the libraries are trying to serve, what collection development principles and policies are in play, and what is important to have on site and in hand. The

opportunity here is to think flexibly 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.

A third issue is the importance of welcoming people into library spaces and involving them in the development of print stacks, how they are displayed, and how their content or research is communicated. This is one approach to collection development outlined in the whitepaper. By involving users in the ongoing development of curation, exhibition, and displays, libraries could encourage a greater sense of investment in our collections and space use. This approach may aid libraries in efforts to create inclusive and diverse collections and spaces over time that reflect various informed perspectives on societies and the human experience. As with all scholarly communication, exposure to new ideas and different perspectives should enrich all users' research pursuits. The co-creation of collec-

tions may bring new users into library spaces to develop a personal interest in the content and display of materials.

A fourth issue to highlight here is encouraging the notion of library collections as powerful pedagogical tools. Learning to navigate collections also teaches lessons about finding and evaluating information that may be applied not only to the library as an institution but also beyond its walls. In treating collections as a pedagogical tool, new considerations about the design choices related to open stacks arise. Who collects and why? What can people do with what has been collected? What's missing? How does format matter? How do people learn from choosing among formats? If academic libraries design print collections by applying various critical lenses to enable learning and inquiry and develop user research skills, they can build stronger and more engaging collections that will help promote more conscious and effective use of the library by learners and instructors alike.

Our 21st-century world, and by extension the academy, functions most effectively with a public that has adequate access to information and opportunities to build and hone literacy skills. Print literacy in particular is often overlooked by educators because digital skills are a growing concern for a digitally engaged citizenry. The ability to use print books is often taken for granted as something learned by young children that does not require further reinforcement in higher grade levels. Some believe that there is little to learn from the

continued on page 33

physical book as an object. However, there are many benefits to using and discussing the physical form of a print object, including how to navigate content using a physical volume, visual cues about content evident from inspection of an object, its weight, form, and structure, and how engaging with a physical format can hold a reader's attention. Providing access to information and teaching literacy skills related to both print and digital materials are key to library space and stack design. In addition, the time for favoring one medium over another has passed; for the foreseeable future, digital and print materials will co-exist in academic library spaces. Libraries have the opportunity, then, to adapt spaces and collections to remove obstacles to access and enable the interplay of the physical and the digital, leveraging print volumes so that our users can build literacy skills with confidence.

ASU Library has taken a careful look at the issues raised in the whitepaper. The timing is excellent, as **Hayden Library**, the largest library on the Tempe campus, is now empty in preparation for a major renovation. The renovation provides an opportunity to rethink ASU's approach to the print collections that will return to the building for in-person exploration and discovery in 2020. ASU conceives of the building as a space where learners and scholars study, work, and interact with each other, and with library collections, services, and expertise. It will be a space that meets the needs of our diverse community of users who are doing everything from accessing course reserve materials to serendipitously discovering resources of personal and intellectual interest.

The design approach for the **Hayden Library** intermingles various types of space, seating, and resources into a cohesive whole. An example is the lower level, which will host active learning classrooms and smaller-scale book shelves that hold active, "loud" print books to attract the attention of students, along with eye-catching digital displays for highlighting resources that relate to coursework. By contrast, the fourth floor will host "quieter" volumes, such as disciplinary works that provide a range of historical perspectives, in the largest stack footprint in the building

along with ample quiet and individual study spaces. Even though "quiet," these stacks will still be active and intentionally designed and evaluated. This approach will be informed by firsthand knowledge of our users, data about library resources, and community practices and preferences. The design will also join curated print stacks with art, small exhibit spaces, and various types of furniture to accommodate individual preferences for space and study postures. Intentional design of space, on-site collections, and environments to suit the local context are hallmarks of ASU's approach to reinvigorating **Hayden Library** for the needs of 21st-century learners and scholars.

At ASU, curating resources for the community promotes a focus on local identity; it helps us build bridges to people and groups with whom we want to have long and meaningful relationships. Learning more about our users and what they want and need from libraries is key to designing new opportunities for interaction. For example, libraries can consider designing print collections and spaces for first-generation degree seekers, non-traditional students, military veterans, and other underserved groups whose interests may be unmet by many academic library print collections.⁵ 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.⁶

To further this work, ASU Library has received a grant from **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** to explore a data-driven and community-aware approach to developing inclusive print collections for the **Hayden Library** 2020 reopening. In 2018 and 2019, Library staff are developing, carrying out, and assessing several experiments to engage with scholars, learners, and community members in order to gather data about what is relevant to their needs, wants, and interests. In addition, librarians aim to test out ideas for collection selection methodologies, book display, and delivery mechanisms. Data gathered in this process will inform the design of our open stack collections for 2020. The hypothesis is: by gathering data and designing for inclusion

and relevance to our users, **ASU Library** staff will develop welcoming collections that will increase engagement with our spaces and collections and ensure a bright future for academic library print collections. 🌱

Endnotes

1. The sheer volume of academic library print collections has doubled within the lifetime of every tenured professor in America as of 2006. Cf. **B. F. Lavoie** and **R. C. Schonfeld**, "Books without boundaries: A brief tour of the system-wide print collection," *The Journal of Electronic Publishing* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2006). Accessed March 15, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0009.208>.
2. For a critique of this perspective, see **David E. Jones**, "Collection Growth in Postwar America: A Critique of Policy and Practice," *Library Trends* 61, no. 3 (Winter 2013): 587-612. Accessed March 26, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2013.0002>
3. **Megan Oakleaf**, "The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report." *American Library Association*, September 2010. Accessed March 29, 2018. http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/value/val_report.pdf
4. See: **Emily Lynema**, **Cory Lown**, and **David Woodbury**, "Virtual Browse: Designing User-Oriented Services for Discovery of Related Resources," *Library Trends* 61, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 218-233. Accessed March 26, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2012.0033>.
5. **Nancy E. Fawley** and **Nikki Krysak**. 2013. "Serving Those Who Serve: Outreach and Instruction for Student Cadets and Veterans." In *Imagine, Innovate, Inspire: The Proceedings of the ACRL 2013 Conference*, edited by **Dawn M. Mueller**, 525-531. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries. Accessed March 11, 2018. https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lib_articles/427. See also **Lorelei Rutledge** and **Sarah LeMire**, "Beyond Disciplines: Providing Outreach to Underserved Groups by Demographic," *Public Services Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (2016): 113-124. Accessed March 26, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228959.2016.1157565>
6. **Office of the President**. "New American University: Toward 2025 and Beyond." Arizona State University. Accessed March 17, 2018. <https://president.asu.edu/about/asucharter>.