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Changing Operations of Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The University of California, Merced (UC Merced) opened in 2005. Both the campus and the library are celebrating their first decade of operation. This paper will examine decisions made at the founding of the library and which of these decisions remain valid today. The focus will be on collections, technical services, reference services, instruction, digital assets, and space.

The University of California, Merced Library: “Not What Other Research Libraries Are, What They Will Be”

This motto, created by Donald Barclay, one of the founding librarians at UC Merced, is still on the home page of the library’s website. It reflects the approach taken to the creation of a new research university library on a new research university campus. For the most part, members of the initial cohort of librarians had many years of experience in large, traditional research libraries. All had opinions as to what was working or not working in those libraries. They also realized that the founding of UC Merced gave them the opportunity to reexamine established ways of building collections, providing services and using space. Even though the results of this reexamination would need to be implemented within the structures of the University of California, the founding librarians would have the opportunity to develop a research library model that reflected 21st century thinking in librarianship and that also worked in the UC Merced context.

Both the library and the campus have now completed ten years of operation. This is an appropriate time to examine initial decisions in collections, technical services, reference services, instruction, digital assets, and space and see how these initial decisions have played out during the past decade.

The University of California, Merced, the tenth campus in the University of California (UC) system and the first new American research university in the 21st century, welcomed its first class in 2005. The initial class comprised 875 students, mostly undergraduates. At the end of its first decade of

operation UC Merced has 6,700 students including almost 400 graduate students. There is a proposal currently under review (the 2020 Plan) to construct sufficient academic buildings and student housing to allow the campus to grow to 10,000 students including 1,000 graduate students by 2020. If approved by the University of California Board of Regents, the 2020 Plan envisions the University of California partnering with a commercial developer to build almost one million assignable square feet of new construction (effectively doubling the size of the existing campus) with occupancy of some of the buildings in 2019.

Collections and Technical Services

In 2005 the library opened with the following collection development parameters:

- *Support the emphasis on interdisciplinary work.* Rather than have traditional academic departments, faculty were to be organized into research groups with members from various disciplines. To support the vision, collections needed to be built primarily to support this interdisciplinary work, rather than the individual research interests of particular faculty.
- *Utilize system-wide structures as much as possible.* For collections this meant participating to the greatest extent possible in UC-wide licenses for journals, e-books, and databases negotiated by the California Digital Library (CDL), an office of the University of California Office of the President. It also meant utilizing the

internal UC ILL system to access the 39 million volumes in the UC collection.

- *Favor access over ownership.* The primary goal was to provide access to information resources, not to build an owned collection of a particular size.
- *Prefer resources in electronic format while at the same time providing information resources in the most appropriate format.*
- *Collect only electronic federal government information.* The UC Merced Library became an all-electronic Federal Depository Library in 2004 by relying on Marcive's Documents Without Shelves service.
- *Do not collect microforms.* At the same time the library did purchase equipment to enable reading, printing, and scanning of microforms received through ILL.
- *Use ILL to meet the needs for retrospective print.* Focus print book acquisition on prospective titles.
- *Do not have subject selectors.* There was not a sufficient number of librarians to assign as selectors.

In 2015 all of these parameters are still in effect, with one partial exception. The library has begun to develop some retrospective print collections in support of teaching and research in the humanities. The goal is to develop core collections of titles that need to be physically at UC Merced because the need for these titles cannot be adequately met by ILL. While there still are no librarian selectors, the library is exploring ways to improve communications between the library and the faculty.

Currently the UC Merced collection is 91% electronic by format and 85% electronic by expenditures. CDL licensed resources comprise 65% of the collections budget. There has been widespread acceptance of electronic journals and an increasing acceptance of e-books. At the same time, there remains a continuing demand for print books—both retrospective and prospective—in the humanities.

In 2015 the library has 116,300 current serial subscriptions, the vast majority in CDL-licensed packages, and 21 print serial subscriptions. An approval plan supplemented by firm orders at faculty request is used to acquire print books in the humanities and social sciences (the science approval plan was cancelled several years ago). These titles are in turn supplemented by strategic gifts. Currently the print book collection comprises 123,000 volumes. Available e-books total 1.2 million volumes, with 800,000 acquired through UC consortial licenses negotiated by the CDL. The remaining 400,000 e-books are available through local licenses: 128,000 volumes through a subscription to ebrary Academic Complete; 216,000 volumes through an EBL demand-driven acquisitions (DDA) plan with three short-term loans (STLs) and purchase on the fourth access; and 55,000 volumes through a DDA plan with MyiLibrary with purchase on the second access without STLs. The large number of titles available through DDA plans is contrary to standard collection development practice. This approach was taken at UC Merced in response to the rapid, uncoordinated increases in faculty hiring and creation of academic programs at a start-up campus as well as the lack of librarians to do title-by-title selection. Given these circumstances, the librarians believed that it made sense to have a large number of titles available through DDA. This approach worked well until the summer of 2014 when many publishers significantly raised STL rates. This action forced the library to reduce the number of titles available in the EBL pool by 50% in order to remain within budget.

From the beginning, technical services has been a very lean (but not mean) operation. Currently collection services comprises one librarian who primarily manages collections and provides general supervision of technical services, and two staff who manage electronic and print collections and who supervise two student employees (1 FTE). This staff has been able to assemble a current collection of 1.47 million titles primarily through the extensive utilization of vendor services. Examples are the receipt of files of MARC records from vendors and the use of shelf-ready services for approval and firm order books. Technical services staff are also greatly assisted by

the work of the University of California Shared Cataloging Program that provides MARC records for CDL-licensed electronic resources.

Reference

The library has employed a triage reference system from 2005 to the present. No librarians have ever sat at a reference desk at UC Merced. There is one services desk that is primarily staffed by student employees supervised by access services staff. Since 2014 this desk has also been staffed by campus Information Technology (IT) staff and is the primary public contact point for campus IT services. Reference questions that cannot be handled by student employees are referred to a librarian. Students can also schedule an in-person meeting directly with a librarian. The student employees at the services desk are supplemented by additional “roving reference” student employees who receive additional training. These students wear a special t-shirt for identification and circulate through the library to provide assistance if asked. The library is part of the UC-wide 24/7 digital reference service using OCLC’s QuestionPoint technology. Both librarians and select library staff cover UC Merced Library’s assigned hours. A number of questions received each day during normal business hours are from UC Merced students who apparently would rather ask a question online than in person.

Instruction

From the time of initial planning even before the library opened, it was clear that there would not be sufficient librarians to meet demands for in-person library instruction as the campus grew. Therefore, the librarians developed various online, asynchronous tools that could at least supplement in-person instruction. The first such tool was the library tour originally on the iPod Touch, now on the iPad Mini. The tour is updated annually to reflect new shelving locations after stack shifts, new services, such as campus IT staff now at the services desk, etc. The reach of the instruction librarians is also increased by the development of online tutorials, both locally and in cooperation with other UC libraries. The library

instruction program has forged close working relationships with the campus writing program. Even so, the library still had to cancel in-person support for Writing 1, the most basic level writing course, in order to concentrate on supporting Writing 10, the next level course. While all sections of Writing 10 are visited by a librarian, several sections have an “embedded” librarian who works with the students on the research process throughout the course. In 2014 a drop-in writing center was established in a library instruction room. Librarians continue to provide instruction to individual classes upon faculty request.

Digital Assets

Digital Assets in the UC Merced Library is active in four areas: Supplemental Course Resources (SCRs), digitization projects, electronic theses and dissertations (ETDs), and data curation. The first service developed by Digital Assets was Supplemental Course Resources. This is the library’s implementation of electronic reserves in which links to journal articles, e-books, or digitized chapters of print books are placed in the course management system. Until very recently, the library did not have a print reserve operation but used SCR to meet the need for course support in a manner consistent with copyright law. In the fall of 2015 the library began a small-scale pilot with a few faculty of a print reserve system. Books are placed on reserve if the amount of text requested to be scanned exceeds fair use or if the library doesn’t have an e-version of the title.

Beyond SCR, Digital Assets has pursued a variety of digitization projects. The first was a project funded by a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to digitize art from the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture in Hanford, California. Another was the digitization of a collection of Japanese medical woodblock prints from the University of California, San Francisco. Currently, Digital Assets is working on several projects related to the themes of food, water, energy, and health. An example is a collaborative project with the University of California, Riverside to digitize records of

irrigation districts as well as other records related to water in California. Another example is a project in collaboration with the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources to digitize the records of the county extension offices in California. Recently Digital Assets completed the digitization of over 2,000 costume renderings by Dunya Ramicova, a UC Merced faculty member who has had a distinguished career designing for opera and theatre. This collection, along with the Clark Center collection, is now available on Calisphere, a portal to digital collections from the UC Libraries as well as other libraries, archives, and museums in California.

The UC Merced Graduate Division adopted a policy at the opening of the campus that all graduate theses and dissertations would only be accepted in electronic form. Instead of shelving print copies of theses and dissertations, the library uploads digital copies to the UC open access institutional repository and digital publishing platform, eScholarship, maintained by the CDL. If authors have executed release forms, ETDs are accessible to the public through eScholarship. Those lacking release forms or under embargo are preserved in a dark archive at the CDL. It has taken some time to develop workflows between the library and the CDL and between ProQuest and the CDL, but these workflows are now in place. OAISTER records are generated from the files in eScholarship and uploaded into WorldCat. These records are edited by UC Merced in accordance with the system-wide policies for cataloging UC theses and dissertations.

Data curation has become an important focus within research libraries. Within the University of California the CDL has developed several important services in support of the UC Libraries role in data curation. The UC Merced Library seeks to utilize these services, not duplicate them. The first is the UC institutional repository, eScholarship, and the associated digital preservation repository, Merritt. Originally developed as a means of displaying and archiving text, these complimentary services now accept datasets as well. The CDL has also developed a persistent identifier service for datasets, EZID, and a tool for developing data management plans

required by funding agencies, DMP Tool. At UC Merced Digital Assets functions primarily as a broker linking faculty with CDL services or the services of other repositories, such as the San Diego Supercomputer Center. In July 2013 the University of California Academic Senate adopted an open access policy covering tenure-track and tenured faculty. Recently the University established a parallel policy to cover all UC employees including lecturers and librarians. The CDL has worked to implement technologies to facilitate the deposit of articles into eScholarship. The campus libraries, including the UC Merced Library, provide outreach to faculty and now to other employees in support of the policies.

Space

The UC Merced Library building was designed to maximize the amount of user space, not the number of books housed. The current library space is approximately 80,000 sq. ft. on three floors. Design priorities were to maximize the use of natural light and to make the building as open as possible by utilizing large staircases between floors. This space will support approximately 850 users at one time using a combination of wooden tables, extra-wide carrels, and soft seating. All of the study tables and carrels have power and data. During the afternoon and evening, current occupancy averages 70% with occupancy as high as 90% during midterm and finals periods. The building was designed with thirteen-, four-, and six-person collaborative workrooms equipped with screens and white boards. These rooms are so popular that an online reservation system had to be implemented. The theoretical capacity of the book stacks is 200,000 volumes, although the practical capacity is closer to 185,000 volumes.

The library building was designed with a café serving hot and cold food in a multistory glass atrium. Several of the glass walls can be raised in appropriate weather. With a café in the building, the librarians decided that it didn't make sense to attempt to limit food and drink within the building, even though this was contrary to accepted library practice. For the past decade, there have been no restrictions on food and drink anywhere in the building, except in special collections. The results continue to be positive:

students do not need to sneak food and drink into the library, library staff do not have to spend time being food police, and spills are reported and cleaned up promptly.

Conclusion

With very few exceptions, the approaches developed by the founding librarians remain valid after a decade of operation. The transition from print to electronic journals is nearly complete. The transition from print to electronic books has proceeded at a much slower rate than expected in the humanities and social sciences. Even though the library maintains its policy of preferring information resources in electronic formats, considerable time and expense continue to be devoted to maintaining a print approval plan, purchasing print copies at faculty request and now beginning retrospective purchasing of print to build core collections. While expenditures on print in the sciences are negligible, expenditures on print in the humanities and social sciences are likely to remain significant for the foreseeable future.

As a result of anticipating a faster transition from print books to e-books, the founding librarians did not see the need to establish a print reserve system. In fall 2015 the library yielded to the requests of various humanities faculty and began a pilot print reserves program. It is unclear if this program will need to be continued at some level in the future.

The foundational principles are still in effect. The library continues to build primarily electronic collections through CDL-negotiated UC-wide licenses. Reference services continues to employ the triage model; the only significant change is the addition of the 24/7 chat service. Instruction librarians continue to leverage technology to meet increasing demand. The development of digital library content and services continues to grow in importance. The library building remains a heavily used campus hub. At the end of its first decade of operation the UC Merced Library is poised to join UC Merced in the next decade of growth.